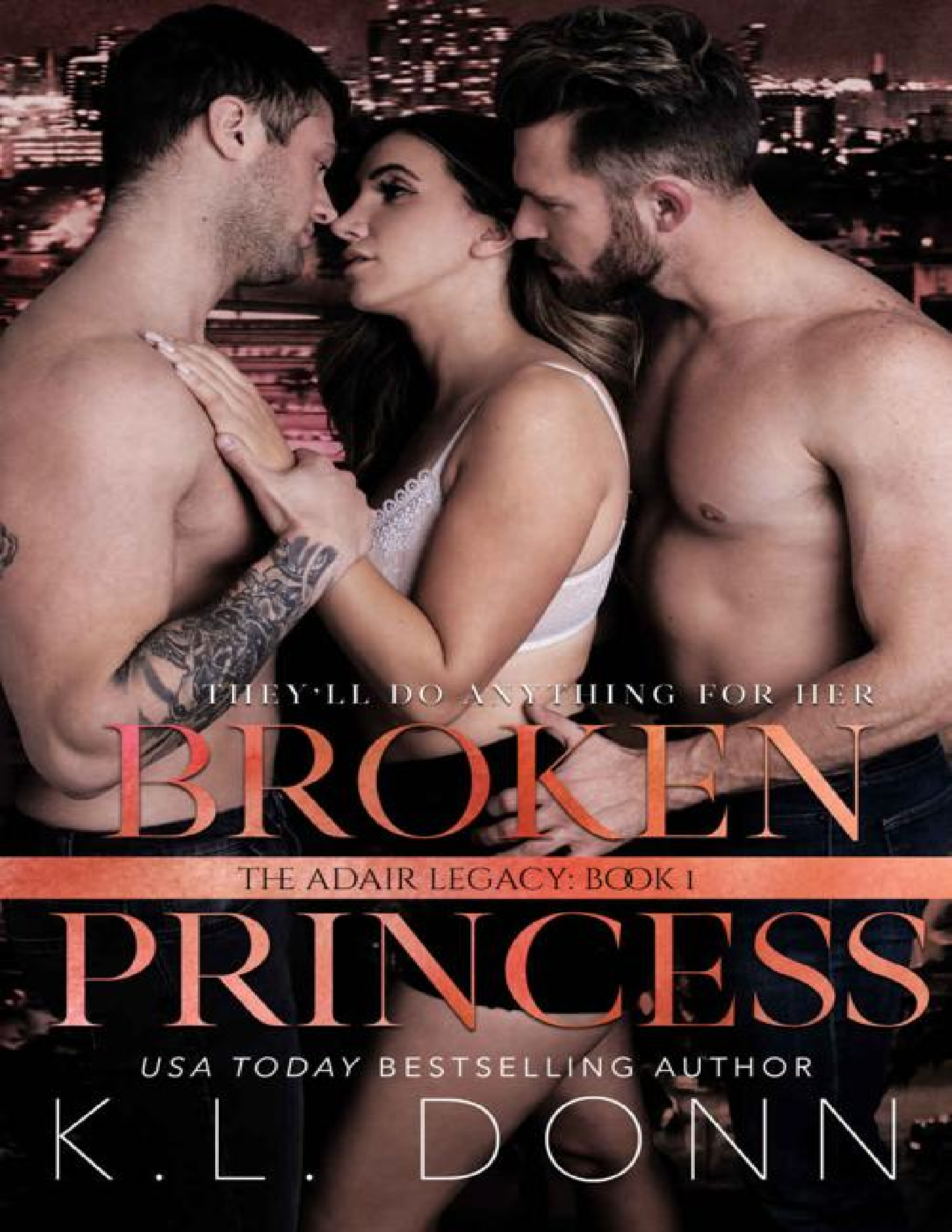
THEY'LL DO ANYTHING FOR HER
BROKEN
THE ADAIR LEGACY: BOOK 1
PRINCESS
USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR
K.L. DONN

Broken Princess

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ADAIR LEGACY BOOK 1

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Next in the Adair Legacy
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Praise for Broken Princess

Wow! I absolutely have no words about this book!! It was so incredible!

— AUDREY KROFCHICK, GOODREADS REVIEW

What's better than revisiting the Adair empire? Having a triad between three of the Adair kids. Seven, Severo, and Aria kick off the Adair Legacy series in Broken Princess and these three light it up. I haven't read a good ménage since…well since the last one KL Donn wrote.

— CAROL NOY, GOODREADS REVIEW

Holy freaking shizzballs!! When the prologue shattered my nerves, I knew this was going to be good! Good?! That is a freaking understatement!!! F***ing amazing more like!!

— LYNNE GARLICK, GOODREADS REVIEW

I was a goner with the prologue and hooked. From start to finish I couldn't put down the book. Severo, Seven and Aria give you a completely addictive read.

— AMANDA M, GOODREADS REVIEW

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Synopsis

*From USA Today Bestselling Author **KL Donn** comes the Adair Empire spin-off series**, Adair Legacy**. **Broken Princess** is the **first standalone** book in this all-new **darkish romance** series.*

Aria Adair is the princess of the Empire. Her father—King—rules with an iron fist, and her mother is just as deadly. The one thing Aria has always known, though, is she's loved. Her whole life, she's felt it, reveled in the knowledge that no one could take it away from her.

Until that fateful night when everything changed.

Kidnapped. Beaten. Left to burn alive in the trunk of a car. She had no hope of surviving.

Seven and Severo Petrov-Corelli have always known, from the day she turned fifteen, that Aria Adair would be theirs. They've protected her without anyone knowing and saved her on the day she was slated to die. Finding her burned, scared, and broken, they hunted her tormentor and exacted the justice Aria deserved.

As she healed, picked up the pieces of her teenage life, and learned to live with her scars, the Petrov-Corelli twins kept their distance. Biding their time and waiting for Aria to reach eighteen so they could lay their claim once and for all.

The trouble with waiting is that it opens the field for someone else to believe they can lay claim to the Adair Princess as well.

Only this time, she might not survive.

Alpha males ✓

Menage romance ✓

Age gap ✓

Over the top obsessiveness ✓

The Adair Legacy will check all your boxes and leave you breathless for more. But beware, there are dark elements in each book, and they may not be for the faint of heart. These are the children of the Adair Empire, after all.

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Dedication

For me. I have adored diving back into this world again and I hope you enjoy it too.

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Prologue

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KING

Four years ago.

"Motherfucker!" Everyone in the house comes running into the war room as I scream. The contents of my desk, now on the floor, shattered.

I'm not fucking done yet, though. Not by a goddamned long shot. Some motherfucker is about to die.

"Boss?" Cas is the first to walk closer. The air in my lungs forces harsh breaths out, and I know I look like a rabid fucking dog.

"Someone took her." No one needs to ask who I'm talking about.

I only get this livid over two girls in my life. My queen, Lilith, and our daughter, Aria. The little princess who wasn't supposed to make it. She was meant to die, the doctors said, but my girl is a true Adair. She's a fighter. She takes no prisoners and pushes through life.

"Danny-boy, get on surveillance at the school," Cas commands. Born at six months, Aria has spent much of her life in and out of the hospital with an auto-immune disorder. She's been home the past three weeks with a terrible flare-up and begged to go back to school today.

At fourteen years old, she just wants to be treated normally. As normal as an Adair can be anyways. In the best private school in Pensacola, Florida, her security is tight, which makes me wonder if we have another mole.

"King?" Lilith's fearful voice penetrates the haze that's clouded my sanity.

“My queen.” I hold my arms open for her as she worriedly strides forward, and the men surrounding me remain silent as she surveys the room.

“What’s happened?” The nervous tone in her voice suggests she has an idea.

Sitting her on the couch, I kneel in front of her as Luther stands behind her. Dimitri and Atticus bookend both sides of her frightened body. They know her reaction may be worse than mine.

“Aria,”—she shakes her head in denial, and my fury continues to spike —“has been taken.” There are no rose-colored glasses in our world.

“By whom?” she forces out. Tears spill down her cheeks as she pales.

“I don’t know.”

“What do they want?” Her lower lip trembles.

“I don’t know.” I hate not having fucking answers.

Her eyes narrow, and I know I don’t have to worry about her falling apart… I have to worry about her slaughtering someone without blinking an eye. “What do you know, King?”

“Nothing yet.”

Pushing away from everyone, she stands and walks to the window. “Dimitri!” she snaps.

“Yeah, Lil?” D stands and meets her stare.

“Find my daughter's guards. Bring them to me.” A smirk plays on the other man’s lips as he nods and leaves the room.

“My queen, behave,” I mutter.

“My baby is missing, King. My little girl is scared and needs to come home.” Her words are vehement, but her eyes show vulnerability.

Pulling my love into my arms, I look to Luther with a nod, and I know he’ll have everyone in the house on it. Including her brother Holden. Our boy protects his sister like she’s *his* child half the time, and I know if he and the Petrov-Corelli boys get to whoever took her first, we’ll never have answers. Only body parts.

Aria

Gasping awake, I look around the darkness surrounding me, and sheer terror invades every fiber of my being. I'm gripped in the icy cold hands of death and struggling to remember everything Uncles Luther and Cas taught me.

I was warned from an early age that I was the vulnerable one. I was the one our enemies would focus on because I'm sick. I'm always damn well sick. And while I don't understand all the dealings my parents are involved with, I know the majority are illegal.

I notice how people fear my dad and uncles like venomous snakes. My brother and all the other boys of my generation are precisely the same as their fathers. And we girls get left in the dark, guarded, loved, placed on a pedestal that is now crashing down.

I have no idea when I was taken. What day or time it is even. I *do* know I'm in the forest somewhere because I can hear the call of an owl, so it must be nighttime or close to it.

"Breathe, Aria," I say to break the silence I'm encased in. "Luther and Cas told you what to do." Taking a couple of deep breaths, I register the faint scent of gasoline in my nostrils, and fear blasts through my veins.

Feeling around me, it doesn't take long to figure out I'm in the trunk of a car. There should be an escape latch, though, and I struggle to find it. Touching along the panels above and beside me, I can't locate the small handle that's supposed to be there.

"It won't be there, little girl." I freeze at the voice. I recognize that voice.

"Please let me out, Tristan." He's an older boy at my school. He has asked me out a number of times, but I'm not allowed to date, and even if I was, I've always gotten a bad feeling from him. He cornered me in the bathroom at school once and tried to force a kiss on me. He touched me inappropriately, and when I fought back, he slapped me so hard across the face I had a black eye.

My older brother, Holden, got so angry when he found out. He's always watched over me; same with two of the Petrov-Corelli boys, Seven and Severo. They're the twins of Danika, Dimitri, and Daniel and have always been by my side whenever I've gotten sick. I felt safe with them, so I confessed what had happened.

Tristan spent a month in the hospital after that, swearing a blue streak that I would pay for it. That was almost four months ago, though, and I don't understand why he's doing this now.

"You'll never see the light of day again, you little cock tease." I was never a tease. I'm only fourteen, and he's about to turn nineteen. I wouldn't have been interested no matter what.

"You don't have to do this. Please let me go, and I won't tell anyone," I beg, openly crying. I can't find the latch, which might mean it's an older car.

The loud whoosh of oxygen being sucked into something and the smell of fire invade my senses, and I scream. "Let me out!" Smoke quickly fills the trunk, and I know it won't be long before I pass out and burn to death.

"See ya, cock tease." Tristan's laughter fades as he leaves me to die.

"Daddy!" I scream over and over until my throat is hoarse and I've lost my voice. "Holden!" My brother has always been my savior. From the time I was born, I was the princess. And everyone treated me that way.

"Daddy, please!" I cry again.

I can see flames licking at the seat behind me, and a new idea strikes. Turning my body so my feet are pressed to the back seat, I begin kicking with all the strength I have. Inhaling more and more smoke with every labored breath.

The smell of burned metal and leather makes everything so much worse. The chemicals permeate my lungs, so I can barely breathe; my throat feels like it's on fire. My eyes are swelling shut. The heat of the inferno scalds, and I can feel it chasing my legs with every kick.

When the seat finally gives way, a sense of relief rushes through me, and I scramble to turn myself, ignoring the searing skin as I crawl through the tight opening into the back seat of the car.

The vehicle's interior is almost completely engulfed in flames, so when I cover my head with my arms and hurl myself at the back window, flying through fire and broken glass, I can feel my body burning. The side of my face gets the worst of the pain as I fight to free myself of my clothing and roll around in the dirt.

I was right. It's dark out. The only light comes from the engulfed car just feet from me as I try to pry my eyes open. The cool breeze across my nearly naked body makes me shiver. The sound of the owl plays on, my personal, devastating symphony, as his prey eludes him.

Pain soaks into my flesh like a wet sponge, and as I drift into the darkness, my focus has settled on a broken rose. A lonely flower of one, singled out by the burning light of the fire.

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CHAPTER 1

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Aria

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PRESENT DAY.

Scars may heal, time will pass, but memories? Memories last a lifetime. And mine? They haunt my every waking moment of every single day.

Tristan Walker took everything from me four years ago. He stole a life that never belonged to him, and I'll never learn why. As soon as Seven and Severo Petrov-Corelli saw me in the hospital bed, they went on a rampage even their fathers couldn't control.

Tristan was found, piece by piece, for weeks.

I was haunted with pain.

Nobody knew who committed the heinous act. But I did. I saw it in the boys' eyes every time they would look at me. I can't understand why they did what they did and probably never will, but I'll be forever in their debt.

"Aria?" My mom knocks on my bedroom door. My family is… different. I'm one of the girls, so I don't get exposed to the darker aspects of my father's business, but I know not all of it is on the legal side of the law. My mother keeps Daddy from going off the deep end. Or so I'm told. I think, sometimes, it might be the reverse.

"Hi, Mom." I brush my dark hair over the right side of my face, trying to cover the scars. Even after missing a full year of school, I'm still able to graduate with the rest of my class. That's what today is: graduation day.

"I hate when you do that," she scowls as she enters the room. Pushing my hair back, Mom never hesitates to touch my scars. She's always insisting I wear them with pride. Show my strength. I don't feel strong, though.

"I don't like people staring."

"I'll kill anyone who stares," a masculine voice chimes in.

“Holden!” I wasn’t expecting my brother to be here. Running into his arms, I wrap my arms around his neck, and he picks me up, spinning me around before placing me back on my feet. “I didn’t know you were coming.”

“Do you really think I’d miss this?”

“I wasn’t sure. You’ve been so busy.” My eyes drift away, and I feel shame that I doubted him.

“Aria.” He brings my chin back around. “I’d never let you down. You know that.” I do know. He didn’t four years ago or even a year ago. Not when I was five and my dog was hit by a car. Never has Holden let me down.

“Well, I’m glad you’re here.” I smile at him, biting my tongue to stop from asking about the two people I want to see most.

“Come on, princess, time to go.” Mom ushers me out, pinning my hair away from my face as we walk down the stairs.

“There’s my girl.” My father, King Adair, is standing at the bottom of the stairs with Uncle Cas and Aunt Talia.

“Where’s Hadley?” I frown. Born only weeks apart, we’ve been best friends and nearly inseparable since birth.

“Outside.” Cas winks, and I know they’re up to something.

Rushing to the doors, I fling one open to see Hadley standing next to two matching Lexus’s. One in white, the other black. “What is this?” I ask her.

“They’re ours!” Her blonde hair bounces as she jumps and twirls.

Gazing back up at my parents, I ask, “Seriously?”

Daddy nods. “Black one is yours.” Tossing me the keys, I catch them as Holden comes down the steps with a scowl on his face.

“Don’t you think it’s too soon for that?” My brother is a perpetual worrier.

“Not by a long shot.” A new voice interjects, and I spin to see Severo Petrov-Corelli stalking towards me, an intense look in his blue gaze. “Hey, princess,” he mutters before his hand balls my hair in a fist, and he drops a serious kiss on my lips. I’m so shocked, I don’t know how to react, and soon, he’s gone.

“What the fuck, Petrov!” Holden roars as he pulls Severo away from me, shoving him and yelling. I don’t hear a bit of it; I’m still lost in the feel of his lips on mine.

“Hey there, pretty girl,” Seven murmurs in my ear from behind, turning my head around and repeating his twin brother's actions. Shocking me with a kiss I have no idea how to process.

I like it. I liked both.

But two.

Both of them?

What do I do with that?

“For fuck’s sake!” Holden looks murderous, and I know things are about to explode.

“You taste like candy, pretty girl,” Seven whispers as Holden storms over.

“I told you both to back the fuck off. She isn’t ready!” my brother snarls at the twins, and both plant a smirk on their faces that pronounces their dimples. So much like their dads’. Even though they’re twins, heavily favoring Aunt Nika's features, one is fathered by Dimitri and the other by Daniel. No one knows which but me.

I can tell. Severo is calm and sweet; he carries a lightness in his soul, more akin to Daniel’s. While Seven is darker, his eyes scream with wicked intent, and he rarely smiles, much like Dimitri.

“What the hell is going on?” my father roars, death in his cold gaze as he looks between the twins and his oldest son.

“These two”—Holden points to the brothers—“have been itching to lay claim to Aria for months.” His gaze, so much like Daddy’s, narrows on his best friends.

“That true, boys?” King asks them point-blank while Mom stands at the top of the steps, a devilish gleam in her eyes. She set this up. Lord, I love my mother.

“You break her heart, and Cas and I will slit you from nut to neck,” Daddy warns, and Uncle Cas grins. Mom and Aunt Talia look pleased with themselves.

“You are in for so much fun,” Hadley whispers to me.

“You can’t be fucking serious!” My brother is irate.

Walking over to him, I wrap my arms around his waist and hug him tightly. “I’m okay now, Holden; you can stop worrying about me.” I understand exactly what his problem is. He’s been my protector my entire life. More than a decade separates us, and I’ve always known he was the

example I would hold every other man in my life up to. Seven and Severo are every bit as good as him. Well...in their own ways.

I know most of the younger guys work in the Adair Empire, and Holden has been groomed to take over the business. But none of us girls know how deeply the illegality goes. How corrupt it may be. What we do know, however, is that we live by a code of honor that no one else understands.

Family is sacred.

The innocent remain untouched.

And no one harms the females.

If those rules are ever broken, death becomes a man.

Seven

I knew we were going to send Holden off the deep end when we showed up with him to claim his sister. Just like I know before the night is over, he'll be out for our blood. And we'll gladly bleed for him because then he'll understand how much we'll do for Aria.

Our princess.

Since we were children, Severo and I have protected the girl. We've been her shields against the world. We never failed her in all her years on this earth until *that* night. The night Tristan Walker took her, and we thought she wasn't coming home. I'm not sure what my brother and I would have done if that had come to pass.

Since then, we have stopped two more attempts on her life. Each and every one of them fucks has met a gruesome death. Tristan was our most brutal, though. He may have been young, but he knew exactly what he was doing when he set our Aria ablaze.

It was the first time I'd seen Severo come unhinged. His torture methods would have made Carver proud. It wouldn't be the last, however.

When our enemies discovered she was going back to school, someone tried to infiltrate the campus as a janitor. We intercepted, and now he's somewhere in the Gulf.

The last one was intent on blackmailing the Empire. They wanted money more than anything else. The man tried to abduct Aria when she was out with Hadley, Lake, and Scotlyn, shopping for one thing or another. I didn't pay too much attention to that after catching a glimpse of Aria in some blue silk number. Her stalker, though, was surprised to know both of us had a hard-on for the princess far more than he did. The man is currently in a Mexican prison for drug smuggling.

I don't remember when we decided that Aria belonged to us, only that it was as natural as breathing. With her by our sides, we know nothing can stop us from conquering the world, should we choose to.

"You need to calm down, Holden." Severo's easy-going voice penetrates my thoughts as I observe Aria with an intensity that has her squirming as she watches us.

"The fuck I do!" our friend snaps, pulling Aria behind him like we're the enemy.

"Really, man? You think we're gonna do anything other than treat her like a fucking queen?" My barked question pauses him to think.

"I think"—King's dominant voice speaks over everyone—"should your sister decide this is the type of relationship she wants, the choice is hers." He smiles fondly at his only daughter. "However, if either of you does anything to hurt her, I'll have your heads." The second warning isn't surprising. If I'm honest, I'm sure there will be more in the future.

Severo and I both nod because we expect nothing less from the man. Aria deserves the world, and we're going to be the ones to give it to her.

"Fuck," Holden hisses, and I can't help my smile. "Fine. If this is what she wants."

Everyone looks to Aria, and before she can say anything, Hads interrupts. "Look, this is great and all, but we have a ceremony to get to and a party to make an appearance at. I'm dragging Aria along with me. Follow or stay!"

Aria's face is beet-red, and her shy eyes dash between Severo and me before she follows her friend, and they're pulling out of the driveway. King and Lil chuckle as they, Cas, and Talia make their way to their own vehicle.

Left standing with Holden in front of the house, knowing the rest of our family is on their way to the school, we wait for Holden to say more.

"What are you going to do when a job pulls you both out of town?" he finally asks, and I see where his mind is at.

“One of us stays.” Severo’s reasonable response would be acceptable, but we’ve always worked best as a team.

“What are you going to do when you find a woman of your own, Holden? Wouldn’t you be happier knowing that you can pounce on that and Aria will be secure in her future than worry about her later?” I counter.

“Fuck,” Holden hisses as his fingers twitch. The eldest of the kids has dark secrets that not many know about. Everyone thinks they have Carver to watch out for or even Saint. They’re kept on leashes, but nobody ever suspects the killer prince. Every bit as deadly as his father.

Severo pats Holden on the shoulder as we walk to our car, intent on following Aria to her graduation. Watching her walk across that stage is like permission granted for us. She’s finally old enough.

Holden hops in the back as I take the driver’s seat. “I can’t believe she’s fucking graduating already,” he sighs.

Severo and I share a smirk.

“Becoming a woman,” I poke at him, and he glares.

Laughing as we pull out and head to the high school, the drive is quiet until we pull into the parking lot, and I see some asshole trying to get Aria and Hadley’s attention.

Severo

I notice my twin tense before seeing what’s got his back up. As he storms towards our girl and Hads, Holden curses and trails after him. Usually, I’d be trying to calm Seven down, but this is one instance where his possessiveness will work in our favor.

When the kid grasps Aria’s hand as she turns away from him, I see Seven pull a blade from the back of his pants, and I know shit's about to hit the fan.

Quickening my pace to a jog, I slip the knife from my brother’s hand before he can bring it up and hold it to the boy's neck with deadly intent.

Instead, I show the prick exactly who Aria belongs to by gliding a hand around her neck and turning her head to face me.

“You left without us,” I grumble just before taking her lips in a kiss meant to convey ownership. Her tiny fingers grasp the front of my shirt, wrinkling the pressed material as I wrap both arms around her back, holding her body close. Feeling Seven move in behind her, I spin her around to face him and watch as they kiss, my cock growing with every passing second and not caring about the crowd watching us.

“I knew she was a cock tease,” I hear someone mutter behind me, and before Seven can react, I’m turning to zero in on my target. Noticing a pale-faced kid, I know he’s the one who said it, and I don’t hesitate to land a breaking blow to his nose. The spurt of blood and crunching of cartilage as he drops to the ground crying has a sadistic grin creeping across my lips as he stares up at me in shock.

“Anything else you’d like to say?” I dare him. It’s not as if these people don’t know who Aria is, who the people around her are. So when they say and do stupid shit, they should realize what could happen to them.

“You have his blood on you now, Sev.” Hads grimaces and hands me a few pieces of Kleenex from her clutch.

“Could be worse.” I wipe the offending fluid off my hand.

“How so?” She cocks her head to the side as we stare down at him.

“He could wind up like Tristan.” It’s as if everyone around us is placed on mute upon hearing his name. Nobody has forgotten what he did, and so long as I’m alive, nobody ever will.

Spotting a flash of guilt on Hadley’s face, I want to ask her about it, but she wipes it away with a beaming smile and grabs Aria’s hand, dragging her from Seven’s hold as they sway towards their seating area, giggling as they sit next to another girl.

“Boys.” King’s voice can be heard above the crowd as he calls for the three of us. Distancing ourselves from Aria feels like someone’s pulling my fingernails off with pliers. We’ve spent two years waiting for her; a couple more hours shouldn’t be so hard.

Listening to the officiators drone on about the students' success and their future is drab and boring. I’m getting antsy and ready to snatch Aria up and take her away from here when they finally begin calling students names up to the stage and handing them their diplomas.

When Aria’s name is called, I realize then just how much of the family arrived to support both girls. In all honesty, there was a time when nobody believed Aria would make it to this day. We are, by far, the loudest bunch in the crowd as we cheer first for Aria, then for Hadley, as the girls accept their accolades and pose for a picture with the principal.

“Sit.” I feel my dad’s hand on my shoulder as I'm about to stand to go collect Aria from her seat. Seven chuckles beside me. “This is important to both of them,” Dimitri affirms, waiting to let me go until I nod back at him.

After an hour of more speeches, light snoring can be heard in the crowd, and as everyone looks around, we find two older gentlemen sound asleep while their wives knit. It’s an odd sight, but one that gets the organizers moving and shortening the ceremony.

Finally, the closing words are spoken, and the crowd of graduates gets to their feet, tossing their caps in the air, and I can immediately spot Aria’s hair as she, Hadley, and the girl from before, make their way back to us.

My brother gets to her first and wraps her up in a hug, spinning her around. Her tinkling laughter is refreshing as she holds onto her cap still on her head. “Fucking proud of you, princess,” he murmurs before laying a deep kiss on her lips.

The friend we haven’t met pales, but before I can question her, she spins around and leaves. The look has an odd feeling stirring in my gut.

Aria’s moan distracts me, though, and I give her my full attention just as my twin releases her. “Got any plans?” Brushing the wispy strands of stray hair off her cheek, I get lost in her stunning green eyes.

“Well, there’s this after-party Hadley was invited to. She wants me to go with her.” The warmth in her gaze from moments ago flickers to a dim light of insecurity, and I understand. Not only was Aria not invited, but she’s also likely uncomfortable with going, period.

“Come out with Seven and I. Let us help you celebrate.” My brother perks up at the idea.

“I don’t know.” I feel her fingers playing with the hem of my leather coat before they move to my tie. “I sort of just want to go home. It’s been a long day.” Her shrug makes a growl erupt from my chest.

“Let us take you out, princess,” Seven whispers in her ear as we both move in closer to her. “You only graduate high school once, and after everything-” He cuts himself off. “You deserve this.”

“Go out with them, sweetheart. You’ll regret it if you don’t,” Lilith interrupts, catching Aria’s eye as they watch each other for a full minute.

“Fine. I’ll come,” she says reluctantly.

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CHAPTER 2

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Aria

Walking across the stage, standing up in front of an audience of hundreds, including my peers, was the second most challenging thing I've ever done. Surviving was the first, and moving on hasn't been easy either. So I smiled for a family who wanted nothing more than for me to be okay when all I wanted to do was curl up on my bed and cry.

I break a little more inside every day because I can't be what they want me to be. I'm *not* better, nor am I healed. All the therapy in the world hasn't made my anguish disappear or helped me accept that I'm a survivor and not a victim.

Because a victim is how I see myself.

I've tried for years to be better for my family, my friends, myself. I want to be normal again. Not see monsters inside every shadow. Or jump when a door slams. I can't help it, though. Maybe what I need is more time.

Or maybe I need to go.

It's something I've thought a lot about in the last few months. Packing up a bag full of essentials and leaving before anyone could try and stop me. I think I want to, but fear holds me at bay. Consuming my every last thought until I convince myself to stay.

The way my mother watches me, I think she knows that's how I'm feeling. Encouraging me to go out with Seven and Severo only proves it. I've crushed on the twins for years, sometimes believing I'm in love with them. But they deserve someone put together. Someone who has her life in order. I'm neither of those things.

I’m a hot mess on the best days and a disaster on the worst. The nightmares are constant and hardly afford me any relief. I dream of fire and the smell of burning flesh and wake up screaming into my pillow, praying nobody has heard me.

“Where are we going?” I finally ask my two suitors as my fingers brush across the burn marks on my cheek and trail down my neck to my shoulder. Hadley, Mom, and Lake convinced me to wear this dress, and I only did it because the old Aria would have loved it.

“The Cardi.” Severo turns from his seat to see me pinching the puckered skin of my shoulder, and he frowns before releasing his seat belt and crawling between the seats.

Settling next to me, he pushes my hand away and replaces it with his mouth. The sensation is barely there. A gentle whisper of touch that still sucks the very air from my lungs.

“You always do that,” I sigh, leaning back into my seat as one of his hands moves behind me, and the other glides up through the slit in the side of my dress.

“Do what?” he groans.

My eyes open to see Seven watching us from the driver’s seat as he tries to keep his eyes on the road. “Make me forget.”

This might be the first time either of the brothers has hinted at their attraction to me. That doesn’t mean I haven’t been hugged by them a thousand times in my life or fallen asleep with my head on one of their thighs while we watched a movie.

“You make me forget how damaged I am. How broken I’ve become.” I feel Severo tense as his fingers tighten on my thigh while he pulls away from nibbling along my neck.

“Broken?” Severo asks.

“Damaged,” Seven repeats.

Tears crowd my vision. I can’t stand the disappointment reflected back at me. Not from them. “Chin up,” Severo commands as he lifts my head while cupping my cheeks.

“You’re neither damaged nor broken. You’re a victim who survived. I know you don’t see it the way we do, the way the entire family wishes you did. But Aria, princess, you’re a fucking warrior.” Severo’s glistening golden gaze implores me not just to believe him but listen to the words, absorb them. Feel them in the very core of my soul.

“A warrior.” I never thought about it that way.

“A mother fucking fighter,” Seven adds, slamming a hand on the steering wheel.

I want to see myself the way they do, but I’m not there yet. Perhaps one day. “Maybe,” I whisper in the silence of the vehicle as we pull up to the swanky new restaurant and hotel.

Biting my lip as the valet comes over and Seven steps out to open my door, I stare at him. “I don’t know if this is such a good idea.” I wave my hand at my dress.

I feel Severo step out from behind me, and the door closes. A few seconds later, he’s standing next to his twin. “We’re not leaving,” Seven tells me as they both reach out with a hand. I know if I ask them to, they would. Never have they made me remain where I’m uncomfortable. I also don’t go out in public very often. People stare, it's human nature, but the rude remarks are what spear through my heart.

Taking a few deep breaths, I channel every ounce of courage that Hadley has tried to instill in me and unbuckle my belt before grasping their hands. Gently pulling me from the vehicle, I’m surprised when they continue to hold each hand.

Spending time around polyamorous couples isn’t new to me—especially given their parents. And while the world has become more open and accepting of them, our neck of the woods can still be judgmental. I’d really hate for someone to make a comment that either of these men doesn’t like because they’re impulsive and deadly. If they thought for a second that someone hurt me, they’d pounce like a lion.

Seven

Listening to Aria speak about herself while I was driving and not being able to touch her was one of the hardest things I’ve ever experienced. I fucking hate the way she perceives herself. She’s stronger than she knows, and I look forward to the day she discovers this.

When she hesitated to leave the vehicle, I'm not sure if it was because she's with two men or her burns. My brother and I have always done our best to push Aria to her limits, so she recognizes how strong she is, but she's young, still vulnerable, and figuring out who she is as a woman. That can't be dismissed. But when she's with us, we're the brick wall between her and the rest of the world.

While most people understand not to mess with her because of King, tonight is all about making sure the world knows she belongs to us. Our reputation precedes that of our parents. We've spent years building on the fear of the Empire and ensuring the South knows exactly who we are when we walk in a room.

Like tonight, we made reservations for dinner after speaking to Lilith a few days ago, but that doesn't stop people from moving out of our way as we enter. Aria stands between us with my hand on her lower back and her arm hooked through Severo's. Her white-knuckle grip coupled with her bowed head has my rage nearly boiling over.

The discomfort she feels when being in public, having her burns exposed, is a feeling I wish I could vanquish for her. I hate that she feels the desire to hide away.

Turning my body into hers, I gently cup her cheek and force her to look at me. "You have nothing to be ashamed of." The puckered skin tightens further under the tips of my fingers as she bites the inside of her cheek while moving her free arm up to cover her exposed shoulder. The burns aren't as bad on the rest of her body as they are on her face.

"It's not shame I feel, Sev, it's embarrassment from the staring. I always feel like I have to explain why I'm flawed." Her eyes drop, but not before I catch another emotion. Fear.

"Why do you fear them?" Severo has turned to listen as we speak now.

"Who the fuck has you afraid?" my brother snaps out.

Her head shakes, and I know Aria is done talking about this. She wants to be carefree and feel alive. Tonight is all about giving her anything she wants.

"Your table is ready," a hostess interrupts, holding menus in her hand. Nodding for her to lead the way, Severo walks in front of us while Aria remains in the middle, and I take up the flank. Both of us glaring at anyone who dares stare at our girl. "Here you are." Seating us in a booth at the

back, she places the menus on the table and informs us our server will be here shortly.

“This place is beautiful,” Aria says softly, sitting in the plush leather seat next to me. “Have you been here before?” Her gaze wanders around the crowded restaurant, watching servers carrying heavy trays, couples eating, people coming in and out.

“Nope. Been waiting to bring you,” I tell her.

“Good evening.” A cheery woman smiles at our table. “Are we waiting for a fourth party?” She stares expectantly at Severo.

“Nope.” He leans back, crossing his arms, his jaw ticking.

“Can I get you started with some drinks then?” Her eyes don’t stray from him. Aria begins to shift in her seat, and I get the sense she’s a little jealous.

“Whiskey, neat,” I tell her.

“Old fashioned,” Severo orders.

Aria waits until the woman looks up from her order pad before reaching across the table where my brother intertwines their hands. “Warm water with lemon, please.”

The woman’s eyes slowly travel around the table, taking in the way my arm is wrapped across Aria’s shoulders and the way she leans into me. When Severo begins kissing her knuckles, the sweetest blush works up our girl's cheeks, making my dick grow.

“I’ll be back in a few minutes with those.” She gives a tight nod and walks away.

Leaning over to kiss her neck, I whisper in her ear, “I like you possessive, princess.”

“I don’t know what you mean,” she denies as her eyes graze over the menu in front of her. My brother and I share a knowing look as we give her the moment of space. This is new for Aria, and we vowed to each other that we would understand and give her the time she needed. But I’m finding I’m having trouble doing so.

“You do know there’s no scaring us off, right?” Ro tilts his head to the side while assessing her with his calculated gaze.

She doesn’t hesitate to return his scrutiny. “I know you think you know what it’s like to be me. Now, before, always. You’ve been around since I was born, watched me grow up, rescued me.” Her breath catches, and she closes her eyes for a quick second. “But you have no idea. None of you

boys know what it’s been like for me, Hads, Lake, and especially Scotty. You can’t begin to comprehend the hell we go through because people think they know us, our families.”

“What are you saying?” I ask, shifting in my seat to face her.

“You guys have the added advantage of being large; you have bulk behind you. But us girls? We’re slight, petite even. Add in the fact every single one of you has over-protected us our entire lives. I don’t think we’ve ever told anyone but each other about the things we’ve faced in school. The girls ostracizing us because boys see us as forbidden fruit. A challenge to conquer.” Her voice grows angry with each word spoken.

“Are you saying you girls never told us when you were being bullied or harassed?” I can see my brother growing tense, his anger simmering beneath the surface. While mine turns volatile.

“Yes. Because we know the consequences.” She doesn’t blink at sharing that revelation, and it has me thinking over all the times that one of us boys fought back for the girls.

She’s right.

Everything we did was always to the extreme.

It’s not likely to change either.

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CHAPTER 3

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Severo

Dinner was…illuminating.

After dropping Aria off at home with the promise to pick her up after lunch today, I find myself sitting on the front deck of Seven and I's shared house as the sun rises, hot coffee in hand, contemplating everything Aria told us. Every single one of our moms was in the midst of some horrific crisis when the dads met them.

Raising us to be protective of our moms, sisters, and female cousins was ingrained in us from an early age. What happened to Aria seemed to be the catalyst to more tragedy. Two years later, Lake Sutton was off at summer camp, and when she came home, she was a mere shell of the bubbly girl who left.

For over two years now, she's never told a soul, as far as we know. I don't know if it's because of the aftermath of Aria being found or something more sinister. But ever since, Saint Rivers has been slightly more psychotic than usual, which doesn't say much because he's a scary beast.

"You're still thinking about what she said." I hear my twin's voice from the doorway. Without looking at him, I nod, recognizing that he's been up all night, the same as me.

"Not knowing what else she's gone through is eating me up inside. I want to tear the walls of that school apart and drag every single person in there to the dungeon and terrorize them the way they did her. All four of them." I fucking hate that the girls hid this shit from us.

Hate even more that we didn't pick up on it.

Staring into the empty cup in my hands, I feel Sev move closer before sitting in the chair next to mine. "All we can do is be there now. Be her

buffer while letting her grow. Lord fucking knows we don't deserve her, but I know neither of us is willing to walk away."

Minutes separate us in age, but sometimes I wonder if Sev isn't twenty years older for all his wisdom. He's right. I'm not walking away. I couldn't, even if I were a better man. This possessive feeling I've had for Aria spans well over a decade. Call me crazy, call me sick, so long as everyone calls her mine.

"We waited for her, brother; she's the reward for all the shit we've done. For all the survivors we've saved." Crickets chirping break up the silence of his statement.

For years, the Adair family has helped abused women, children, and even a few men escape their situations. From all parts of the world. I don't know how or when it started, I just know that at sixteen, it was the first time Seven and I helped a young mother and her two children escape the clutches of an abusive husband. It was also the first time we killed a man. The taste for blood hasn't diminished, but we reserve it for the truly depraved people of the world who more than deserve anything we dish out.

"Survivors," I repeat the word. That same mother told us she was no longer a victim. That because of us, she was a survivor. Since then, we've never referred to another rescued person as a victim. She was right; the abuse was over for her, and she could live again. Ever since then, we've been sure to give the same advice to everyone we've helped.

Aria included.

"It's going to take King a while to get on board with this. She's still his little girl," I tell him.

A grin works across my brother's face. He loves nothing more than a challenge. "Aunty Lil is going to help. Hads is going to help. Holden knows she's ours. Has for years. King is a puppy compared to them."

A bark of laughter erupts from my chest at his description of our uncle. A puppy he is not, and he'd kick our asses if he ever heard us refer to him as such.

Aria

“Did they kiss you?” Hadley’s scandalized whisper makes me laugh as she hides her face in her coffee cup so my dad doesn’t hear her.

“Too fucking early for this bullshit,” my dad mumbles as he walks out of the kitchen as the doorbell rings. “I’ve got it!” he calls out like a herd of giggling girls is running for the door.

“Well?” Hadley implores me with a stern look.

Rolling my eyes, I take a long sip of my coffee before finally answering. “Yes. Both of them did. Multiple times.”

“Both?” Her eyes widen as large as saucers. I nod. “Are you going to choose one?”

That particular thought never entered my mind. “Do I have to?”

“Aria, you have a guest.” Dad’s chilling voice has us both looking up to see our friend Kelsey Ward following along behind him. She transferred to our school at the beginning of the year and immediately befriended Hads and me.

At first, I was leery due to my past, but eventually, I accepted her shy attitude as being more like me than I thought. She never made many friends outside of us, and I think that’s why she’s always coming around. She didn’t take the time to acquaint herself with more people.

“Morning, Kels.” Hadley jumps up to grab a cup. “What’s going on?”

Her typically present smile is missing today. “Nothing.” She shrugs, and I share a quick glance with Hadley.

“Did you go to that party last night?” I ask her. Hadley said it was pretty boring, and she left after an hour.

Her scowl is all the answer I need. “There was no one there I wanted to hang out with.” I see Hadley’s eyebrows purse together as she places the hot brew in front of our friend.

An awkwardness overtakes the room as Hadley tries to bite back the retort to Kelsey’s subtle insult, and I work on not squirming. I can clearly see something is on the other woman’s mind, though.

The dinging of my phone stops me from doing or saying anything else, and I breathe a sigh of relief. Seeing a group text between me, Seven, and Severo, I can’t hide my smile.

Sev: Thinking about you princess.

Ro: Fucking miss you baby.

“Who’s that?” Kelsey asks, and I miss the tone of her voice.

“Her men.” Hadley giggles as she comes over to see what they’ve sent. “You’re going to be a greedy bitch and keep them both, aren’t you?” I know she’s playing with me, but I glance up to make sure. Her smile is as wide as I’ve ever seen it.

“Two men?” We both look at Kelsey this time. Her disgust is evident.

“What’s wrong with that?” I ask her. We’ve been around trios our entire lives. Our uncles, Dimitri and Daniel, have always speculated that the twins would be no different than them.

“It’s just…gross. And they’re brothers. Isn’t that incest?” I can’t tell if it’s because she didn’t grow up as we did or because she’s genuinely appalled.

Thankfully, Hadley takes the situation out of my hands. “No, it’s not incest. Aria is the focus of their pleasure, not each other. Besides, our aunt and uncles have been a trio for almost three decades, and they are some of the happiest people we know.”

Ignoring the glares my cousin and friend are now warring over, I go back to the two men who have occupied my mind for far too long.

Me: I had fun last night.

I’m terrible at flirting. I don’t even know if I’d recognize if I were doing it. It doesn’t take long for them to respond.

Ro: Pie for dessert tonight.

Sev: Cherry pie.

“Huh?” How did we go from talking about missing each other to pie?

“Oh. My. God.” Hadley breaks into a fit of laughter at the confused look on my face. “Cherry pie, Aria. Dessert. Come on!”

“What about pie?” Dad walks in with Uncles Cas and Luther.

“There’s pie?” Cas gazes around the room.

Uncle Luther looks ready to kill, as usual. “Not even close to what they’re talking about,” he mutters.

Dad snatches the phone from my hand before I can stop him. I’m still confused. “I’m going to fucking slaughter them both!” His hand grips the phone so fiercely it groans in protest.

Hadley looks at her father, now staring at my phone. “Daddy!” she squeals.

“What is going on?” I hate how naïve I am.

“They want to eat your pussy,” Kelsey says bluntly while rolling her eyes and crossing her arms.

I stare blankly around the room while rapidly blinking, waiting for someone to confirm or deny it. Hadley nods enthusiastically while Dad’s face turns an alarming shade of red. “They’re dead,” he barks.

“Who’s dead?” Mom walks into the kitchen. Instantly, she’s at Dad's side when she sees the state he’s in.

“Aria’s boyfriends,” Hadley supplies while plucking the phone away from Dad and handing it to Mom.

It takes her a few seconds to read the messages before she glances up and stares between Dad and me before shrugging. “Can’t kill the boys who are going to make me a grandma, husband. They’ll need their daddies just as much as our little girl does.” Leaving the room after her bombshell, Dad blinks a few times before following after her.

“What the fuck do you mean grandma? There are no grandchildren happening!” Snickering as they bicker, Hadley hands me back my phone before leaving with Uncles Cas and Luther.

Silence surrounds me as I stare at the messages. Still having trouble digesting the meaning.

Kelsey appears livid, but I need to respond.

Me: Why cherry?

Knowing what it means now, I like the idea of teasing the guys a little bit. Even if the idea of them doing that leaves me wet between the legs and short of breath.

Seven

Watching the docks as our parents come into the bay with a young woman and her two small children on board has left Ro and I distracted enough that we haven’t been able to talk about Aria’s response to our teasing. At the time, we had simply wanted to play with her. Gauge her reaction to our desire level. Neither of us believed she wouldn’t have a clue what we

meant. And without realizing it, that slightly shifts the dynamics of our relationship. Not enough for us to stop our pursuit of her, just a delay in the timeline on when we claim her.

Adjusting to a relationship is hard on anyone who's never been in one, but to accept the kind we want, even if she understands the dynamics of it, takes a bit more time. Now, we just might have to give her more of it.

"Where are we going?" Ro asks Dimitri as we tie the boat to the dock.

"Sparrow House six." Aunt Lilith's passion project has three dozen safe houses that nobody knows about outside the family. Each one has video surveillance and panic rooms, and they're all located within one block of a police station or security company. And we have contacts in each location.

We quickly grab the family's few bags before helping the woman and kids off the boat. We don't keep any one group with one of us for too long. The more we move them around, by location or vehicle, the harder it is for anyone to find them.

"What's your name, girl?" I ask the younger one. She looks to be about five or so.

"Penny," she barely whispers.

"I'm Seven." Her eyes widen, and I grin. "Just like the number." I wink when she giggles. "What about you, boy?" He's at least ten but looks fifty. I have no doubt he's been used as a punching bag for too long and has likely even tried to protect his mom and sister.

Glaring at me, he refuses to answer until his mother nudges his shoulder. "Grady," he mumbles.

Crouching down to his height, I look him dead in the eye. "You know how to throw a punch, Grady?" If there's one thing I'm going to teach this kid, it's how to defend himself in a pinch.

"Kind of." He glances up at his nervous mother.

"Good. Next time, kick him in the nuts. When he drops, grab his head and smash it off your knee. Then you run, and you call me." I hand him a card. Something I do with every boy I move. Thankfully, we've kept every family safe so that none have ever had to be used. "I'll do the dirty work."

"Let's go," Ro barks as he lugs the bags while I carry the girl. Mom and the boy walk between us. "No phone calls. No leaving unsupervised. In a week, you'll have new names in a new city. Everything here is left in the dust." I've heard my brother repeat the same thing a few dozen times, and the looks he gets always vary.

This time it’s relief. “We have nothing here anyways,” the mother says as she glances between her children while trying to keep up the quick pace.

An hour later, we’re sitting outside the little house watching the neighbors and streets as people come and go. When there’s no sign of the woman’s husband out looking for them, we drive away.

Another person saved.

Another nightmare ended.

A new beginning born for a deserving family. Penny and Grady are going to be scarred because of what they witnessed, but they have a mother who loves them enough to heal them in the coming years. Not everyone’s as lucky as they are.

We’ve shown up to a scene too late on more occasions than any of us would like to admit. It’s never easy walking into a house where we've failed. Seeing lifeless women holding on tightly to their children, even in death. Sometimes the kids are still alive, but mostly everyone is deceased. We’ve learned to take the wins when we can.

“You think we’re trying too soon?” Severo asks in the silence, his fist clenching the steering wheel so tight his knuckles turn white.

Not looking at him, I contemplate my answer. Aria Adair is, by far, the most watched-over person in our large family. She’s the youngest and most vulnerable because of her autoimmune disorder and what happened to her. Because of that, she isn’t as worldly as Hadley, who is only a few weeks older than her.

“No,” I finally answer. “She’s innocent as a baby lamb.” A wicked grin spreads across my face. “It’s going to be a true pleasure corrupting her.”

Severo

Shutting any feelings I have off when we’re moving families is what keeps me sane. I don’t bond with them the same way Seven does. I don’t ask names or tell them mine. Or give them a direct line to me. I get them safe, I

give them instructions, and I ensure they understand the risks of breaking the rules.

Our little brother Santo learned the hard way about what happens when you get involved with a client. They bonded over the short time they were together, and wanting to be like Seven, he gave her a card.

She called him day and night until finally, he couldn't answer anymore. She was taking over his life in a way that the then twenty-two-year-old man wasn't ready for. When he stopped answering her, she called her husband. The man killed her before they left the safe house.

Santo burned it to the ground and left for California with our cousin Damien Sutton. They're good for each other, and they've built a protection agency that's doing well. They're established and happy, and as much as our mom and Aunt Ariel would like them both to come home, I don't see that happening any time soon. Both boys feel they have something to prove. As the youngest males in our generation, the two of them have always felt left out.

It burns me a bit that our little brother felt so strongly about leaving that he did it without telling us. In the dead of night, they were both gone. I also understand. That driving need to be something outside of the Adair legacy is what we all strive for.

Our fathers paved the way for us to be anything, do anything we all wanted with our lives. They built this empire from the ground up. When Mom and the aunts came along, I don't think any of them expected to drift away from hookers and drugs to help women escape domestic violence.

They still run guns, but they're a lot pickier about their clientele, and Holden Adair's calculated rage has many more men afraid to use the weapons he sells to them against innocent victims.

In a lot of ways, the Panhandle is safer than it was thirty years ago because of the killer prince. Having Holden seemed to have curbed the beast inside of King. There is nothing he wouldn't have done to protect Lil and Holden. Then and now.

When Aria came along, it was an unexpected surprise. I still remember the day our girl was born. Months too early. She wasn't expected to live, let alone make it out of the hospital. She died three times after birth, but she's a fighter. The epitome of a phoenix rising from the ashes.

Growing up, she was clumsy, awkward, and shy. Her medical episodes always seemed so close together that when she went an entire year without

one when she was eleven, the whole family hovered around her—protecting her from everyone and everything.

Then at the first hint of freedom, with only guards rather than us, Holden, or one of the cousins, she was kidnapped. Tristan ruined any semblance of safety we thought we'd encircled Aria with.

The night we found her, bloody, burned, knocking on death's door, I was prepared to die right beside her. There was no way I wanted to live in a world where Aria Adair didn't exist. Glancing at my brother, I remember his anguish as well.

Never had I seen my brother shed a tear before that day. I knew that if she didn't leave that hospital, we'd have died there with her. Suicide isn't something either of us had ever thought of before that night, but we sure contemplated it in the days after. When she wasn't expected to survive. The burns, the smoke inhalation, her compromised immune system, they were all a deadly mix for her fragile body.

At fourteen, she was too young for us to be sexually attracted to, but there was always something about Aria. From the day we first held her, we made a silent pact always to be her guardians in the shadows. Failing that one time nearly broke us. And now I can finally see what all our and the family's protection has done to her. She's a sheltered princess about to be taught a lesson in sin.

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CHAPTER 4

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Aria

Standing in front of the mirror in a dress Hadley picked out for me, I don't know whether to smooth my hands down the soft fabric or run behind the curtain.

"What about this one instead?" Kelsey holds up another garment in black. With a turtleneck and long sleeves, everything would be covered from ankle to chin.

Hadley rolls her eyes. "As if. We're not in the eighteen hundreds, and this one fits Aria like a second skin. The boys are going to kneel at your feet in worship."

Anger clouds Kelsey's eyes at Hads's blunt explanation before she shoves the dress she chose on a rack in the changing room we've kept occupied for an hour.

"Lake, tell them." My best friend looks to our cousin.

"It's pretty." Lake Sutton is the most attractive girl I've ever seen. With her startling blue eyes, snow-white hair, natural ruby red lips, and porcelain skin, she drives all the boys wild, but she doesn't care about any of it. A couple of years ago, something happened. Nobody knows what, and she refuses to tell. I think a lot of that has to do with Saint Rivers. Deadlier than his father, Carver, Saint has been in love with Lake from the day she was born.

Or so I'm told.

"She needs more than that, Lake." Hads drops down onto the bench next to her. "She looks fuckable. Edible. Lickable."

"Hadley," I groan. My best friend is a bit on the wild side, sometimes, and she never holds back what she's thinking. I love that about her. When

it’s not directed towards me.

“What?” she shrugs. “The twins have been dying to get their hands on you for a long time, even if they won’t admit it. You have all summer to explore everything with them before you decide whether you’re going to college or not. Give them a chance, Aria; not everyone is *him*.” Hadley has never been able to say his name since that night. Tristan lives between us like a dirty secret.

I know Hadley crushed on him around the time he decided to obsess about me. She even tried to intervene a couple of times, but it was like she was invisible to him. And while she’s never expressed it out loud to me or anyone else, I know she feels guilty. I hate that for her. Hadley is one of the best people I know and doesn’t deserve the guilt hanging on her shoulders.

“Turn again,” Lake says, her eyes darting side to side to make sure nobody else heard her.

I do as requested, and this time, I quietly admire myself in the mirrors. That's how I catch the look on Kelsey’s face.

Lust.

For me.

The red silk shows far more skin than it covers, and with the way her eyes crawl across my flesh, I can almost feel the caress. Suddenly, the last few weeks make sense now. As well as her animosity towards Seven and Severo.

“They will love it,” Lake finally comments as my gaze drops from watching Kelsey. I don’t know if I should say something to her or leave it.

“Alright,” I agree half-heartedly. “Did they say where we were going?” Hadley got a text about twenty minutes after the pie fiasco and immediately hit me up to shop.

“Nope. Which is even more exciting!” Jumping up, she claps her hands before leaving the curtained area in search of who knows what.

Dropping down next to Lake, I clasp her fidgeting hand in mine, entwining our fingers. I know she’s barely here, lost in a world all her own, suffering. The fidgeting is how I know it’s super bad. That she’s almost lost to us.

“Thank you,” she whispers, pressing her forehead to my bare shoulder, and I can feel how warm she is.

“I can’t believe you’re going to do this.” Kelsey’s voice penetrates our little bubble. “Do you know how slutty you’re being?”

Lake tenses next to me. Neither of us does well with confrontation; that's Hadley's department. "Kels, what is going on with you lately?" Letting go of Lake, I stand in front of her.

"Me?" she scoffs. "What about you? You get a little bit of attention from those two, and suddenly, you're this ginormous slut." The words sting. I've been afraid people would see me like that, being with two men. I didn't think I would care, but hearing the words from a friend hits differently.

"You don't mean that." I try to hide my insecurity, but I'm not sure it works because she strikes with the accuracy of a sharp knife.

"Yes, I do. You had Tristan wrapped around your finger. But he saw you for what you really are. A dirty whore. So he threw you out like the trash you are." Blinking, I don't know what to say or do. I've never seen Kelsey be cruel to anyone before.

Soft fingers grasp my hips, and I feel Lake standing behind me. Before either of us can say a word, though, Hadley is storming through the curtain with a bag in her hand. A thunderous look of rage on her face. I almost feel sorry for Kelsey. *Almost.*

"You fucking bitch. Who the hell do you think you're talking to? If not for Aria, this year would have been shit for you. Nobody gave a fuck about you until she sat with you. And now you want to comment on things you know nothing about?" A sinister laugh I've never heard from Hadley erupts from her chest. "If you aren't out of here in the next three seconds, I'm going to snap your little twig neck and piss down your throat."

Kelsey's angry gaze darts between the three of us before she huffs and storms out, knocking a rack over on her way.

"What the hell happened?" Hadley asks us. Glancing back at Lake, we both shrug.

"I have no idea. She just went off on me. Telling me I was a slut because I'm getting all dressed up for two men." I can't hide my disappointment. She attacked every raw nerve inside me with her comments. All my fears brought to light in one breath.

"She's just jealous." Hadley tries to reassure, but I don't know.

"Maybe," I sigh, remembering the look she gave me when she thought no one was watching her.

Severo

“That son of a bitch.” I stare over at Holden as he watches the news play out. Reporting about Patrick Ames, that asshole who killed a little girl, as he’s set free. A murderous fury surges to the surface for all of us. But Holden especially.

He didn’t know the family, but when he found out about this guy, he was blind with rage. And now, I wouldn’t be surprised if Ames mysteriously vanishes.

“He’ll get what’s coming to him,” I comment. Someone will inflict worse on him than he did that little girl. Men like him don’t get away with shit for too long.

Switching the TV off, Seven grabs our cousin’s attention. “We need you to be okay with Aria and us, Hold. Because if she thinks for a second that you disapprove, she’s going to run faster than a rabbit trying to outmaneuver a wolf.”

“She’s already ours, man.” I chime in. “But she loves you more than anyone, and she’ll fight if you don’t accept it.” Christ, she’d kill us if she knew we were over here bartering for her like she’s a possession.

“She’s only eighteen,” he points out, and we nod. “She doesn’t even know what she wants with her life yet.”

“We’ll help her figure that out,” Sev insists.

“Help her or impregnate her?” Holden’s voice is hoarse, barely able to think of Aria and pregnant in the same sentence.

“Help,” I reply. “The idea of her pregnant is enticing as fuck, but we know as well as anyone that Aria deserves more. To travel, go to school, have a life. We’re just saying, we want to be there with her as she does it all.”

Holden stares at us for so long, I think he’s going to pose an argument. I should have known better. “Couldn’t think of two better men to claim my little sister than you two.” He finally grins, reaching forward to shake our hands. “I don’t want any details, though. Spare me that, will you?”

“Wouldn’t share anyways. She’s ours, not the world's,” Sev growls. He’s never been big on sharing. Except with me. And only Aria.

Aria will be the first woman we've had together. Sev and I haven't lived like monks. We've had our fair share of women in the past, but not in a couple of years now. Not since Aria popped up on our radar as the woman we craved.

I don't know how or when we decided she would be ours, but the decision was made, and we've never looked back.

"Where the fuck is this asshole?" Holden rechecks his watch as we wait at the Beechmont warehouse for a buyer who is thirty minutes late now. Vega Cruz is a potential new client out of South Miami.

He called Holden late last night, insisting on a meeting today. After being told we wanted to meet him first, he cursed up a storm. But we didn't grow the business by being fucking stupid. We meet all new clients first. That way, we can sus out if they are undercover cops.

While the majority of the Adair Empire is on the up and up nowadays, we still deal in guns. Our dads and uncles got out of women and drugs a couple years after the kids started to arrive.

I never understood it until recently. The need to protect those most precious to them has been hard-wired in our parents' lives since they met their spouses, and now, with Aria almost becoming ours, I fucking get it.

Waiting here, with this sketchy asshole being late, has me on edge, and from the way my brother and Holden keep looking around, I get the feeling they are having the same thoughts.

"You think this is a setup?" I look over at Holden as his eyes slowly scan the roads leading towards the warehouse.

Movement to the east catches our attention, and each of us reaches for the guns we always bring along to these meetings.

"Backup," Holden directs as we watch two men with automatic rifles hidden under long coats stroll casually down the road.

They haven't seen us yet, so we remain in the shadows of the cracked door, waiting to see what they'll do next. "Ro, go upstairs, see if you can get a better look. If they've got other guys with them." Nodding, I do as he asks, and I'm pissed because I know this is going to interrupt our evening with Aria.

Seven

From the minute Holden called us to come to this meeting, I knew shit was going to hit the fan. I just didn't expect it to come in the form of bullet spray. "We got any weapons here?" I whisper. We're going to need more firepower to deal with these assholes.

"No. We won't need it." Holden's eyes haven't left the men. "They're going to come to us."

Narrowing my gaze, I get what he's thinking now. It seems a given that these are Vega's men, but we need to draw them inside without shots being fired. Peering around, I see an old metal chair leaning against one wall.

"Let me know when they're on us. They look dumb enough to come investigate a noise." Slowly backing away, I reach the chair and watch Holden for the signal that they're close enough to hear the scraping sound.

With a swift nod from Holden, I shove the chair with a boot before moving quickly back to his side. As surmised, both men carefully enter the dark warehouse. Without much fight, Holden tackles the first guy to the ground before he can react, a knee in his back and his gun pressed to the back of his head. My guy is able to reach his, but I've got him in a crippling chokehold that has him going limp in seconds. Neither of these men was trained for this line of work. Dropping the guy to the ground, we hear Ro chuckling as I relieve the man of his weapons and use the belt of his coat to hog-tie him.

"English, asshole." Holden presses his gun deeper into his guy's skull. "Who are you?" The bastard's cursing a wild streak in what I think is Spanish.

I remain by the unconscious dude with a foot on his back, so I know when he wakes up. The dipshit under Holden's control looks between the three of us and back to his buddy before realization dawns on him. They're not getting out of this unscathed.

"It was a test," he finally confesses.

"For what?" Ro calmly questions.

The man laughs as the one under my foot begins to stir. Putting more pressure at the base of his neck, he wisely remains still. "Vega wanted to

know your moves. To see how you handle a threat. He doesn’t deal with amateurs.”

Holden leans in close to the man's ear. “He obviously has no idea who we are. What we’ll do to keep anything or anyone who belongs to us safe.”

Any humor he was feeling minutes ago fades, and in its place is a mixture of fear and confusion. “What are you going to do?” he finally asks.

Holden doesn’t answer before pulling a knife from his boot and slowly inserting it between the man's ribs. “Damn, H, you’re out for blood today.” My brother whistles as he walks around the pair.

The guy beneath me renews his struggles as the other howls in pain. Holden comes over to us and does the same to this piece of shit before nodding at me to let the man go. “Go back to Vega, let him know that if he contacts me again, the same will happen to him and anyone he holds dear, and we’ll toss every last one of them in a swamp filled with hungry gators.”

Pale and moaning, both men struggle to their feet before running out of the warehouse and down the block.

“Got something you need to get off your chest, H?” I look over at my best friend, and there’s a burning deadliness in his gaze that intensifies more and more each day.

“Nope. Just sick of assholes thinking they can run the fucking world by playing dirty games and fucking around with people they have no idea about.”

“Fair enough.” I glance around at the bloodstains covering the floor, wondering how many years of torture have happened in here. Theirs is only the brightest now, pooling on the ground.

“Don’t you two have a date with my sister?” Holden looks between us as we lock up.

“Yup.” Ro grins, and I can’t help but match his enthusiasm.

“Treat her right,” Holden calls as we part ways. We wouldn’t treat Aria any other way.

Climbing in behind the wheel, I want to go home and shower before picking her up. She doesn’t need to be around us when we smell like blood and cheap cologne.

“I’m having Hads bring her over in an hour. I’m thinking staying in is a far better option.” Ro’s adrenaline must be crashing the same as mine. All I want to do is hold our girl. At home seems like the best idea.

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CHAPTER 5

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Aria

“Are you sure about this?”

Parked on the road just before the turn that leads to the twin's house, I fuss with the hem of my dress. I don’t know what happened today, but I know it couldn’t have been good because my dad was tense and irritable when we left the house.

It makes me worry that Seven and Severo won’t be in the mood for my company or anyone’s for that matter.

“Listen to me. Those two could be covered in blood, on no sleep for ten days, and hungrier than a hound, and they’d still want you between them,” Hadley reassures as she puts her car in drive and proceeds without my permission.

Less than sixty seconds later, she’s dragging me out the passenger side door, donning the skimpy red dress I let her talk me into and leaving me on the porch to either ring the doorbell or walk home in the four-inch heels I agreed to wear.

“Crap.” Pushing the button, it doesn’t take long for the door to open and Severo to greet me with a scowl, wearing nothing but a pair of loose shorts. The intensity in how he watches me—his eyes roving up and down my body in the daylight—makes me feel like I’m on fire. “Uhm, hi.” I don’t know what else to say.

His hand strikes out as quick as a copperhead and grips me around the back of my neck before dragging me into his body. Our mouths collide, and I’m lost in the feel of his hands on my body as my heart beats erratically.

Goosebumps rise on my flesh, and just when I think I’ve got a handle on him, he’s dragging me inside and slamming the door shut behind me.

Picking me up, his fingers dig into my thighs as he continues to plunder my mouth, stealing every breath and barely leaving room for me to take another.

“Severo,” I gasp when he moves to suck along my neck, surely leaving a mark. “Severo...” His name comes out on a long moan this time as I feel his length between my legs. “What happened today?”

His smoldering eyes flick up to glance at me before they close, and he opens his mouth wider on my skin. Biting on me before sucking to soothe the sting.

“Please talk to me.” I gasp when he lets go of my legs, and I’m on my feet. Without hesitation, Severo spins me around so I’m facing the circular mirror placed over the small table holding keys and wallets.

“Should be fucking illegal,” he groans as I feel his fingers trail down my bare spine to where the dress is held together at my hips. “Looking, smelling, tasting so fucking good. Someone’s surely going to heaven for making you so goddamned perfect.”

I snort at his reply, but he ignores me. His hand continues a downward exploration. Gripping the hem of the dress, he lifts it up over my ass, baring me from behind, and my breathing grows labored.

Hot breath is just a millimeter away from my skin, and my thong does nothing to hide me from his view. The light touch of his lips on my cheeks and his palms gripping my thighs from behind has my eyes drifting shut.

I want to talk to him, for him to talk to me, but my body wants whatever it is he’s about to do. My mind screams, "We can talk later". I don’t know that I’ll survive him with the way he’s caressing me. Soft, but possessively.

“I’ve been dreaming of eating this pussy for weeks, princess, fucking weeks.” He’s breathless now, even as I feel him panting against me. “Your smell, it invades me, makes me feel drunk off you.” Shocked to feel his tongue press against me, I jump.

His throaty chuckle makes me shiver as he spreads my legs further and grips a butt cheek in each hand, spreading me wide for his observation. When I feel Severo bury his face between my thighs, I yelp and look over at him as he inhales. His tongue stretches out to lick across the fabric of my thong, making me mewl out my pleasure.

My head drops to my chest as he continues his exploration, so when I feel another set of hands on my body, I let out a moan straight from the soul. Seven drags my head back by my hair and drops a kiss on my lips.

Open-mouthed, tongues dueling, he leaves nothing unclaimed as his other hand unties the top knot of my dress behind my neck.

“It was a rough day,” Seven drawls as he lowers his head to grab the turgid peak of my nipple between his teeth. “We need to fuck.” Our eyes meet in the mirror briefly until Severo does something between my legs that makes my body go limp. “Tell us yes, princess, tell us you’ll be ours.”

“Yes.” As if I could say anything but.

Severo

I was barely out of the shower when I heard the car pull up. Instantly, I knew it was Aria. The world is brighter when she’s around, even if she’s not in the same room. When I opened the door, she looked terrified, unsure of whether she should be here or not.

My anger from our encounter at the warehouse was heightened just thinking about her not wanting to be with us. My aggressive kiss, followed by how I tugged her around, should have scared her off, but it didn’t. And now that I’ve got her on my tongue, I can’t seem to stop. I want to eat her tasty little cunt until she passes out from pleasure. I want her so enraptured with desire for us that she can’t think of anything else.

I sense the exact moment my brother approaches because she grows wetter, leaking more of her sweet honey onto my tongue. Even through her skimpy white thong, I can drink from her core.

So focused on her pleasure, I don’t hear what Sev says to her, but I know when I hit a sweet spot because she grows limp in our arms. Hearing her sigh the word yes, I tear the fabric of her thong from her body, bringing the shredded material to my nose; I inhale deeply. With eyes closed, I groan as my dick pulses behind my shorts.

“She’s fucking delicious, brother.” Squeezing her hips, I slowly climb to my feet, unable to keep my hands off her body.

Seven’s tongue is down her throat as I begin to unfasten her dress. When she feels the bodice start to fall, her hands capture it in a fit of panic,

no matter that Seven won't let her mouth go or that we don't care about her scars. Aria is still self-conscious about the burns on her body.

"Can't hide from us, princess," I murmur in her ear, trailing kisses along her neck and shoulder to distract her while I untangle the dress from her grip.

She allows the fabric to fall to the ground, and Seven finally pulls back to admire her nude body. Aria has always been petite, but she has hips meant for fucking and thighs that make a man's mouth water with the need to hold onto them.

"Fucking gorgeous, princess." She blushes at Seven's compliment and ducks her head.

The room pulses with a nearly suffocating intensity, and my chest rises with a harshness I've only ever felt when hurting a man who has betrayed us. Aria brings out the beast in me, and as much as I want to rut on her like a horny fucking dog, I know we have to go somewhat slowly.

With that thought in mind, my body does what it wants and picks her up over my shoulder. "Severo!" Her voice squeaks as I carry her upstairs.

"Sorry, princess, I can't wait any longer. Seven might have the patience of a saint because he wants inside this ass, but I'm a simple man with complex needs, and I really fucking need to feel you coming all over my cock right now." Her gasp tells me all I need to know. She hadn't thought about what having two men would be like.

She's damn well doing so now.

"Wait." She's out of breath as I reach the bedroom. "Wait, I have to know..." Flipping her over on the bed, I grip the thighs I was admiring previously and spread her wide open as Seven sits on the bed next to her.

"Have to know what?" he asks as I get distracted by her dewy lips and the light sprinkling of curly dark hair between her legs. She's trimmed neatly in such a way that I think I'd be pissed if her pussy were bald.

"If, when-" I see her hands wave between my brother and me, and I stop what I'm doing to pay closer attention. Even if my dick does cry. "Am I going to have to choose?"

"Choose?" Sev says before I can.

"Between…you two." The distress she feels is written all over her face and in the way her fingers fiddle with the sheets.

"Fuck no!" we both shout at once.

“Why in the hell would we put in all this effort only to make you choose between us?” The more I think about it, the more it infuriates me. “Who the fuck put that idea in your head?”

“Do you want only one of us?” Seven asks, a hell of a lot calmer than I am.

Her eyes widen as she looks up. “No! Kelsey, she got in my head and left me wondering if that’s what you would want.” Her shrug is anything but casual.

“Who the hell is Kelsey?” I ask her, not remembering the girl.

“You probably haven’t met her. But she was there at grad. Left in a bit of a huff when you both kissed me in front of everyone.” Ahh, now I remember. I didn’t like her.

“Well, fuck her and anyone else who thinks you need to choose between us because that’s not fucking happening in this or any other universe. Got it?” Her smile lights up her entire face as she nods at me. “Good, can I fuck you now, or is there something else weighing on your mind?” Never in my life have I given anyone *puppy dog eyes*, but I sure as fuck hope I’m doing it right now.

Reaching down to grip my cheeks in the palm of her hands, Aria kisses me gently on the lips and whispers shyly, “Please, Severo, make love to me now.”

Sweetest fucking words I’ve ever heard in my life.

Seven

Who knew voyeurism was so erotic? Watching as my brother, again, dives between Aria’s legs like a starving man and witnessing the pleasure not just on her face but in the way she grips the blanket under her, the way her chest rises and falls, how her stomach hollows out when she holds her breath, gives me a pleasure I’ve never experienced before.

I had no idea she had any doubts before today, but I’m glad as fuck she voiced them because, like Ro, I won’t be able to hold back when it’s my

turn to fuck her. Gripping under her arms, I drag Aria's limp body up the bed and away from my brother, just to piss him off, and it works. He growls with a ferociousness that makes our girl shiver, and her breathing picks up.

"She likes the beast all worked up," I snicker when he glares at me.

With Aria leaning against my chest now, I move my hands to play with her soft tits. Already her nipples are stiff peaks, waiting for their turn to get attention, and I'm happy to do it. Massaging the perfect globes in each hand, she reaches one hand back to hold my neck while her other is fisted in Ro's hair, holding him to her body.

"Let us know when it gets to be too much," I murmur while kissing along the corded flesh of her throat, biting the straining tendon and sucking her into my mouth.

"Don't fucking listen to him," Ro barks as he takes a breath. I chuckle because he has no idea that I have no plans on stopping; I only want her squirming between us.

Twisting a nipple, her chest rises up with me, trying to alleviate the sting. Sliding one hand down her chest and her belly, I push down to keep her in place and watch as Ro sucks her clit in his mouth, not letting up even when she tries to buck him off.

"It's too much. Too much. Oh God." An ear-piercing scream rips from her body as she goes tense between us before dropping back to the bed and shaking. "Please, stop, don't stop."

We both laugh at her request as we hold her down. Ro laps at her pussy like a kitten with warm milk, and I steal kisses from her mouth. Sucking her tongue into mine and swallowing every moan and sigh.

The bed dips as Severo begins to crawl up her body, kissing her as he does. "It's going to hurt, princess, can't help that, but I'll make it so fucking good for you." She whimpers as my brother doesn't hesitate to breach her body, forcing his way through her tightness and past her virginity.

We all moan when he stops moving before stealing her lips from me and kissing her deeply. Dragging her hands above her head, I hold Aria in place as Severo begins to move. She squirms between us again, and I can feel my dick leaking all over her back.

Ro grabs her hips to hold her still, and I use my free hand to reach around her front. Moving on their own, my fingers grasp her throat and flex. She gasps, Ro moans, and a picture plays in my head of stealing the breath from her lungs in order to make her orgasm more intense. Choking

has never been something I've had an interest in before, but I can't think of anything else now.

"She fucking likes that," Ro hisses as his hips buck roughly into her.

"Do you, princess? You want me to choke you while my brother fucks your virgin pussy? While I fuck your ass?"

Aria's eyes are pleading as she looks back and up at me. She wants to say yes. She wants to beg me for it, but she hasn't a fucking clue how to.

"Roll her over." I bark the command. I was going to wait until she and Ro were done. I wanted us to each have a turn. "Let her ride you for a minute." As they move as one, I head to the bathroom and grab a bottle of lube I bought when we decided we were taking her together.

Dropping my shorts as I enter the room, I'm dumbstruck by the sight before me. Aria sitting on top of Severo, her hips bucking back and forth slowly as she learns how to move, with her head thrown back and her hair tickling the top of her ass. An ass I'm going to be fucking very soon.

"Christ, you're fucking beautiful like this, princess." Kneeling behind her, I rub my dick between her cheeks as I kiss along her burned shoulder.

"Seven, please don't make me wait," she mewls while Ro squeezes her tits.

"No waiting, baby, just fucking until you pass out." Pushing her down to lay flat across Ro, I pop open the lube and squeeze some onto my fingers. Gently I probe her little rosebud before thrusting two fingers deep inside her. She jumps and tries to pull away, but Severo holds her steady, whispering praise into her ear.

Tighter than I thought, I slip a third finger in and begin to slide in and out, getting her used to the sensation for a few minutes before pulling my fingers free and wiping them off with the cloth I brought with me.

Coating my dick in the lube, I massage it on with a couple of hard strokes of my hand before nudging through her tight ring of muscles. I start out slow before I ram all the way in. Ro's lips capture her cry of pleasure while I stay still so we can all get used to the tight invasion.

"Jesus, fuck, woman. You're a goddamn killer with this body of yours." I can hardly refrain from fucking her until we're both begging for mercy. Sliding one hand up the middle of her back, I use the other and wrap her hair around my fist, dragging her back so she's arched and her tits are in Ro's face.

It takes a few minutes, but together, we begin fucking into Aria, finding a rhythm where when he slides out, I'm diving home. Once we've got that down, I do as promised and wrap a hand around her throat from behind while still clasping her hair in my fist.

Slowly, my fingers begin to squeeze until I feel her struggling to take a breath. "Motherfucker, her cunt is going to yank my dick off." Ro strains beneath her, the veins in his neck pop as he tries to control himself. "Don't fucking stop, man. Squeeze her tighter; she's like liquid fire here."

Don't I fucking know it? Three more pumps and my brother shouts his pleasure into a mouthful of tit and holds her in place for me as I begin to thrust harder, faster, taking from her everything I want.

With her hands grasping my forearm, I know she's close too, so I begin loosening my hold before tightening it again. Playing with her now, it's not until I feel her nails scraping across my arms that I know she's about ready to combust.

"Come for me, princess. Come all over Severo." A second later, her ass tightens on me, and I'm fucking into her so hard that I'm sure she'll be bruised. I release her throat, and she crashes. Pleasure tears through her as it rips through me, and I explode inside of her, incapable of stopping the way our fluids leak out around my cock, dripping down to her wet cunt.

Collapsing next to Ro on the bed, our hands are all over Aria. Massaging, petting, soothing her until she stops shivering between us.

"I think I got lost there." Rolling to her back, she gazes between us with a content smile on her face. Unable to hide her happiness.

"Good, because we're fucking lost for you." Leaning down, I kiss the red fingerprints on her throat and feel pride at just how much pleasure we all gained from that.

"I'm ready for round two," Severo comments and smirks at our girl's shocked face before stealing a kiss from her lips. "After a nap."

Burying my face in her hair with an arm wrapped around her waist, sleep is quick to take us all.

Aria

“No, no, no, no,” I hoarsely cry. At least, I think I do.

I don’t know anything anymore.

Not time, nor space. Feeling or shadows.

I know pain.

I know excruciating agony.

“Please, let me die,” I cry into the moist soil beneath my charred body. I don’t want to move. To breathe. I want to melt into the earth and become one with nature.

“Not happening, princess.” Seven? I think that’s his voice. But he sounds so aggressive, angry; he’s pissed.

“Who did this to you, kid?” My eyes open slightly upon hearing Holden’s voice. My big brother always saves the day for me. I knew he’d come. “Who hurt you, Aria?”

My vision blurs, and my lungs feel like they’re seizing as I break out in a coughing fit that throws my entire body into spasms that bring sheer misery to my full frame.

“Guys, let us get to her,” a strange female voice calls out. A woman shoves Holden and Seven to the side, and I catch a glimpse of Severo.

He looks homicidal as he stares at the burned-out shell of the car that I escaped literal hell from. Sweet, caring Severo, who loves to make me laugh and tease his twin about always being so serious, is the epitome of the grim reaper right now.

The female paramedic asks me a ton of questions, but I ignore her, my concentration firmly fixed on the three men now huddled in a circle watching me and conversing quietly. I know they’re plotting.

They’re going to kill Tristan, and I feel no remorse about that. He left me to burn alive in the middle of nowhere. Whatever they do to him, he deserves.

“I feel dizzy.” The words exhale out on a forced breath, and there’s loud beeping from the machine next to me as bright white enters my vision. At first, I think it’s a light, but then I realize it's my body failing me.

As I hear the continual flatline tone, I wonder, will I ever get to love?

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CHAPTER 6

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Severo

She had nightmares. All fucking night. And from the way she was mumbling and begging to let her die, I know it was from the night of the fire. She begged us while we waited for the ambulance, after they lost her on the scene, and then on the ride to the hospital. After that, she was sedated until she was stable and through the worst of it. But I know, I fucking know that if she'd been lucid, she'd have still begged to die.

Aria is the strongest woman I know and yet the most fragile. I hate the amount of shit she's lived through, the things she never knew happened, and the things she's going to have to face in the future. All because of her name. What she means to so many people. Seven and I included.

We've done our best to avoid making personal enemies, but people in this business hold grudges. Fabricate problems. And we're not fucking perfect. The best we can do is make sure our girl knows how to handle herself.

"Stop!" Seven barks from behind where I'm standing, hands braced on the counter, arms flexing, waiting for her next attack. He doesn't need to see my face to know what I'm thinking.

"I can't." It'd make life easier if I could.

"We can't control what might happen, only what does happen, brother." Without looking at him, I know he's moving to sit at the counter. Usually, I'm the level-headed one and Sev is the one going off the rails.

Not when it comes to Aria, it seems.

"She was between us all night, and we still couldn't protect her." The coffeemaker beeps, and I have flashbacks of when she flatlined in the dirt.

Like she had been thrown away and meant nothing when, in reality, she means everything.

"She also didn't wake up screaming and crying and wishing she were dead. At least she remained asleep." Freezing, I spin to look at him.

"She does that?" How the fuck did I not know this?

"Frequently." How the fuck does *he* know this?

Slamming a cup in front of him, I debate tossing the coffee on his head. "Why do you know this, and I don't?"

"I'm not supposed to. I overheard Lilith and King talking about it a couple of months ago. As graduation neared, they felt it was getting worse. I had hoped, with us, it wouldn't be an issue." I can see in his eyes that keeping that bit of information to himself has eaten at him.

"What do we do then?" I'm at a loss about it. I've never dealt with nightmares before. Let alone with someone I care so deeply about.

"What do you do about what?" We both turn to see Aria walking into the kitchen, wearing an old sweatshirt of mine. She appears far more rested than I would have thought for someone who was tossing and turning all night.

"Your nightmares," Seven responds to her bluntly.

She grows pale as her steps slow, and I can see the moment the memories come flooding back because she untucks her hair and brings it forward to hide her face while pulling the hem of the shirt down to cover the scars on her thighs. I hate that she resorts to becoming this fearful little girl all over again.

"Did I wake you up last night?" I notice she doesn't apologize, which she usually would have, so I take that as a good sign.

"On and off," I say. "But they were not as bad as when you're at home, apparently."

"They never stopped. The nightmares. For years, Hadley or my mom would sleep with me almost every night. Sometimes Holden did too, but I'd wake up more terrified because, well, he's a man." Her shrug is anything but passive.

"You didn't wake up last night." She nods. "Why?"

She looks between us like we're a couple of idiots. "Don't you know?"

Seven and I share a look, trying to figure it out. We've got nothing.

"No," we answer as one.

Aria

I’ve dreamed of the day when the nightmares would stop. When I would feel safe again. And I always imagined that day would be when I found the person or persons I was meant to be with.

The fact I didn’t wake up screaming tells me all I need to know. I was right. “I’m safe with you. I’ve been walking on a tightrope for years, waiting for my safety net to catch me, and it’s you. Both of you.”

It doesn’t take either of them long to move towards me. Melting in their arms, I’m the most content I’ve ever felt. Nothing can get to me when I’m with them. They think last night was bad because I couldn’t fully escape Tristan’s clutches, but they have no idea how comforting they were, even in sleep.

“He’s always going to haunt me. I wish I could say I don’t think about him every day of my life, but I do. Tristan is a part of me that I wish to incinerate in return. But it’s you two who bring me to life. You give me reason to breathe.” Never in a million years did I believe I would get to say these things to them. I’ve wanted to for so long, but it felt so out of reach.

Seven presses his head to the back of my neck, and I can feel his deep inhale. He’s always trying to draw me into himself. Severo cups my cheeks, and I see the previous darkness that was lurking in his gaze has simmered, and in its place is the lightness I have come to know and love.

Banging on the front door interrupts any further conversation. Both of them groan as they break free of their holds on me. “Stay put,” Severo instructs.

I have no intention of leaving the coffee until I have at least one large cup in me.

“I wanted to kill you both.” My dad’s cold voice causes me to pause as I’m about to pour the hot liquid.

“We convinced him not to. Don’t make us regret that.” I smile at Uncle Danny’s voice. He’s the voice of reason for everyone. Unless it has to do with Aunty Nika, then he’s guns blazing.

“Coffee’s in here!” I call out, forgetting I’m only wearing one of my guy's sweaters. I tug the hem lower; it already covers me to my knees.

Opening a cupboard, I pull out enough coffee mugs for everyone and start pouring as they all march into the kitchen. The twins look smug, as if having their dads on their side means mine won’t still kick their asses. This should be interesting.

“Morning, Daddy.” Smiling, I hand him a cup before reaching up to kiss his cheek.

“I’m not okay with this,” he grunts as he takes a seat.

Holding out two cups for my uncles, I kiss them too. “Morning, Uncles. How are you?” My chipper tone comes out of nowhere because my nerves are on edge, and I’m overcompensating.

“You can’t call them that when you’re sleeping with their sons.” I stare blankly at my father with no idea how to respond. I know he’d never intentionally say something to hurt me, but I feel it all the same. It must be written on my face because he rushes over. “I’m sorry, sweetheart, not even close to how I fucking meant it.”

“Might want to explain how you did mean it then, boss,” Dimitri points out with a scowl. Mom’s going to hear about this later, and it won’t be from me.

Staring up at the man who has loved me beyond belief my entire life, I wait for his explanation. “I’m not ready for this. For them. I knew it was coming from the time you were four years old and fell off that damn bike these clowns removed the training wheels from, even after I told them not to. It's just a lot to get used to.”

Surprised at his confession, I wrap my arms around his waist and wait until he returns the gesture before saying, “I’ll always be your little girl, Daddy.”

“Still not fucking ready.” But I hear the smile in his voice, and I know everything will be okay now.

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CHAPTER 7

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Severo

We dropped Aria off at home an hour after our parents left. Seven and I had to drive to Mobile, Alabama, along with Hendrix and Bishop, to meet with the Deviant Sinners motorcycle club. The club president, Castle, wanted a quote on an escort job for something, and they refused to speak about it over the phone. Because they're only an hour away, we decided to do it today instead of waiting.

"What do you know about these guys?" I ask Bishop, who's in the backseat, reading through something on his laptop.

"Not a lot," he grumps with a frown on his face. "They own a bar and mechanic shop. No public arrests. Nothing in the news, good or bad. There isn't much of anything."

"They've been around for almost forty years, though. Castle's old man was Prez until he stepped down a decade ago. All of them are former marines. The OG guys too," Hendrix chimes in as he hangs up from a phone call. "I did a mission with the VP's team in my early days. Prince is good people." Coming from him, that endorsement is all I need to know that we'll work with these guys. Hendrix doesn't bring up his Army days to anyone.

"Any speculation on what it is they need help with then?" Seven asks.

"Hookers?" Bishop guesses.

We know they don't run guns. Nobody this side of the States does but us. And if they do, they don't get away with it for long. We also know everyone who has their hands dipped in the drug trade, and these guys have never popped up on our radar before.

“Human trafficking?” Hendrix’s doubtful tone suggests he doesn’t believe it, but it’s possible.

“What about smuggling? You have coyotes bringing in destitute Mexicans through Texas. Could they be doing something similar?” Seven’s thought has merit.

“You think they want to use Sparrow House then?” I look over at my twin. If that’s the case, I already know we’re all in.

“Guess we’ll find out.” Pulling into the driveway of the MC's garage, motorcycles line the lot, as well as cars in various stages of rusting. Anticipating our arrival, three men in jeans, heavy boots, and vests highlighting their insignia greet us. I spot their Prez almost immediately as I put the Tahoe in park.

These guys are no less intimidating than we are, and I know if we were on opposite sides, there’d be a shit-ton of casualties for us both.

“Castle?” I nod at the man I assumed correctly. “Severo Petrov-Corelli. This is my brother Seven, that’s Bishop Kincaid and Hendrix Adair.”

“Terror twins, huh?” Castle shakes my hand as he smirks.

“They sent the fuckin cavalry.” Another man laughs.

Castle rolls his eyes. “Shut the fuck up, Joker.” The name seems fitting. “My VP, Prince.”

“Hendrix, man, good to fucking see you.” Prince drags the big man in for a back-slapping hug, but he doesn’t respond.

“That’s Cross, Ranger, Pryce, Joker, and our prospect, Rock.” Castle points to each man as he names them. “How about we go inside and talk.”

“Sounds good,” I reply.

As we follow in behind the man, he issues out orders. “Pryce, Joker, watch the garage. Rock, collect their phones. Ranger, do a sweep.” Seven raises an eyebrow at that.

“Care to explain?” My brother narrows his gaze. We’ve learned the hard way not to trust too many people outside the family.

Turning around as we enter the bar that also happens to be their clubhouse, Castle grins, not at all insulted. “No offense, but we can’t risk 'big brother' listening in.” He nods to Ranger as he enters a blocked-off room with a device I recognize that sweeps for bugs. “Rock here will keep them locked up safe. Key comes with me; box stays with him. Nobody touches anything.

Hendrix is the first to hand his phone over. We all follow suit because if the big man trusts them, so do we. Bishop even leaves his laptop.

Seven

Uncomfortable with not being able to answer if Aria calls, I reluctantly hand Rock my phone. The kid is as green as Santo was before life kicked him in the balls, and he left home. “Our girl calls, and we miss it, I’m going to be fucking pissed.”

All of them look at us as we sit around the oval table. “Our?” Prince is the first to ask.

“These two have taken to sharing King Adair’s little girl.” Bishop grins at their shocked faces. “It’s all about her.”

“You share a woman?” Cross looks skeptical. “You don’t get jealous of each other?”

“It’s new yet, and it might happen, but it’s how we grew up. Our mom is with two men who cherish her. Almost thirty years now. There’s nothing better than being able to watch Aria come apart without being distracted with my own pleasure. Or knowing that if something happens to me, she’ll always have Ro.” It’s simple for us. There are more benefits to sharing her than cons.

“Damn,” Prince mutters. “I still don’t think I could do it, but good for you guys.”

“Business.” Castle’s stern voice draws everyone’s attention. “I know you did your research before coming here. So you know we don’t need you for drugs or guns.”

“You need Sparrow House.” I hazard the guess we speculated about on the way here.

“Would you be open to it?” His direct stare doesn’t give away his feelings, and I respect that.

“Depends on your intended use. Who the people are? And if it follows the guidelines of our shelter given by the state. Lilith won’t risk the funding

they have to fight for every year.” I fucking wish Holden was able to be here, but he got tied up with King in Panama Bay.

“Refugees from Mexico and the Caribbean, mostly Cuba. We can get them here, but once they arrive, it’s hard as fuck to find anywhere for them to go without winding up in worse situations than what they left. Especially when they have kids.” Castle’s explanation is exactly what I expected.

“How do you get them here?” Bishop asks.

The three men glance at each other. “It might be better that you don’t know that part. Nothing dangerous but definitely illegal, and we don’t want to get Sparrow House wrapped up in legal shit,” Cross explains.

“We front all costs. We’ll make donations to Sparrow House to cover any and all expenses. Hell, we’ll fund the construction of more safe houses if that’s what's needed. But we need somewhere to send these people, and we know you guys handle this sort of stuff.” I like Castle’s direct approach. He doesn’t hold much back.

“If Lilith agrees, we can have you up and running in a week. If she doesn’t, though, our hands are tied,” Severo remarks.

Watching the men around the room, they seem to have a silent conversation before Castle reaches out a hand towards me. “That’s fair. We’ll wait for your call.”

“How are you funding this?” Hendrix finally speaks.

“Not sure you want to know,” Prince replies.

“Lilith will want to know,” Hen bites back.

“We run several brothels in Mobile and the surrounding area. Folks from all over come to meet our girls,” Cross explains at Castle’s nod.

I stand and tell the men, “Get your funds together. If Lilith signs off on this, she’s going to want to get started on building new safe houses ASAP. Do you have any contacts in social services?” They’re a massive part of what we do.

“My sister is a social worker here. She’s digging through all the red tape based on a hypothetical, but I think she might lose her job. Fucking stubborn ass woman.” Hendrix snorts because he understands Castle’s plight. His own sister, Hadley, is the same way. Hell, we all understand the stubbornness that is Hadley Adair.

“We’ll talk soon,” I say as I lead the way out of their private room, collecting our phones and Bishop’s laptop as we do.

Aria

Sitting on the steps in front of my childhood home, I stare at my phone. At the message I received this morning just after Seven and Severo dropped me off. I know they're out of town for most of the day, so I strongly debate the request.

"You look concerned." Glancing up, I see Aunt Nika and Uncle Danny leaving the house. Something's going on because this place has been buzzing all day with movement.

"Everything alright?" Danny asks.

"I don't know," I respond honestly. Because I don't.

Kelsey has been weird since graduation. When I got this text from her, I was surprised.

"Anything we can help with?" Danika asks as she sits next to me. I shrug, and she leans her shoulder into mine. Something she does with everyone when she's concerned. "You can talk to me, sweetheart; you know I'll help."

"No, I know. It's just my friend Kelsey. I think she has a crush on me. But that's silly, right?" I can't get the look she gave me at the dress shop out of my head.

"Why would it be silly? You're smart, beautiful, compassionate," Daniel says and grins when I roll my eyes at him.

"You're obligated to say those things." I tease him. "I think she's jealous. Of the twins. She's said some not-so-nice things to me the past couple of days, and now she wants to take me out for lunch and talk."

They share a look.

"What's that look for?"

"Well, be cautious. Maybe wait for the boys to get back. They could go with you. She could get to know them and realize how perfect the three of you are together." Despite my dad's grumbling, I know that both sets of parents are happy for us.

“Maybe,” I murmur, not sure if that’s how I should approach this. “I should let her down gently, though, right? I didn’t think I gave off signals that I was interested, but what if I did by accident?”

Daniel grips a hand as he stands in front of me. I know that he and Dimitri are intimate together, too, and that before each other, they’d never been with other men. “You can’t give signals that aren’t there, Aria. Unless you were kissing her.” I shake my head. “Touching inappropriately or saying things to indicate that’s what you wanted.” I shake my head again. “Then you need not feel guilty, but clarifying things wouldn't hurt. You don’t have to lose your friend over a misunderstanding, but you shouldn’t feel awkward either. Crushes happen. She might not have been able to help it.”

Climbing to my feet, I wrap my arms around his neck. “Thanks, Uncle Danny, you always know what to say. You’d have been a really great girl-dad, but you kind of make the best girl-uncle out there.”

“I won’t tell your other uncles you said that.” Winking, he grabs Aunt Danika’s hand, and together, they walk to their car and leave.

Responding to Kelsey, I let her know I’ll meet her, and she replies quickly with the dock where her family boat is. We’ve gone out on it a few times before, so I don’t find it weird.

After running inside to change and let Mom know I’m going out for lunch, I drive the thirty minutes to the boat arena. Before getting out of my Lexus, I text Seven and Severo, letting them know what I’m doing.

Strolling down the dock, the water is calm today, and I look forward to an afternoon on the boat. Hopefully, mending a friendship I had no idea would wind up broken. I’ve been sad about it because I don’t have many friends outside of Hadley, Lake, and Scotlyn, but *they’re* family. We’ll always be stuck with each other. Kelsey was different. She didn’t stare at the scars or ask what happened. She didn’t make fun of me. Losing her isn’t something I want to do, but I won’t put up with the way she’s been acting either. I don’t deserve it.

“Aria!” I see her leaning over the side of her family’s small sailboat, waving with a bright smile. Relief overcomes me at seeing her so open.

“Hi! I’m glad you texted. I didn’t like the way we left things.” Her smile dims slightly, but I push it to the side because it wasn’t a happy memory, and she might be embarrassed. “Where are we going?” A change in subject is needed.

“I was thinking lunch in Butcherpen Cove?” I nod enthusiastically because we’ve done it a few times, usually with Hadley and Lake. The cove has a beautiful view of Pensacola Bay and the Gulf Islands.

“Anything you need help with?” Gazing up at her as she’s untying us from the dock, Kelsey shakes her head no.

“Once we get on the water, you can go down to the galley and make lunch if you want. I brought everything for sandwiches and strawberries that need to be cut.” Nodding, I help her secure the rope as she takes the helm and guides us out to the bay.

Sitting on one of the lounge chairs at the bow, I watch other water lovers enjoy the beautiful day with clear skies and soft waves. The worry and stress I was feeling all morning have melted away, and it feels like old times with a good friend. Relief makes me giddy.

“If you want to get started on lunch, I’ll be down to help in a few minutes.” Kelsey grins as I look back at her and nod. Making my way down to the cramped kitchen, I open the fridge to see everything she said was here and begin pulling it all out. “Did you bring a swimsuit?” I hear her call down.

“I didn’t think about that.” In truth, I’m not comfortable with it. Even if I’m with a friend.

“There’s an extra one-piece in the room if you want. Nobody will see us; it’s quiet out here today.” Shrugging, I know I need to get over my insecurities, to at least try and trust that my friend won’t stare or make me self-conscious.

“Thanks, I think I will.” I smile up at her as I walk past the opening to the small room. Once the door is closed, I see the bathing suit laying on the bed with the tags still on.

Picking it up, I stare at it. Nerves make my hands shake, and I wonder if I'm strong enough. But before I can even decide if I’m going to back out or not, I hear a lock click in place.

Panicked, I slam into the door and begin tugging. “Kelsey? What happened?”

“They can’t have you,” she says, and her voice sounds robotic.

“Kelsey, open the door!” Keeping my cool is getting harder and harder by the second. “Kelsey, please open the door!”

“She’s mine. You’re mine.” I can hear her retreating as she talks to herself. When I feel the boat make a sharp turn, fear penetrates my body.

Rushing to the window, I see her heading towards the 98 bridge, which leads out to the Gulf of Mexico. We've never left the bay before.

"Kelsey, stop!" I scream, but she ignores me, and then I hear the slamming of the latch that leads down here. "Kelsey, we can't go out there! Kelsey!" I keep yelling her name and banging on the door, but I get no response.

She could take me anywhere.

Do anything.

It's happening again, and I still can't stop it.

Dropping down onto the bed, I drag my phone out of my pocket. I already know I won't have service, but I can send a message, and if we reach an area that does, it could go through.

There are so many people I want to send loving messages to, but I stick with Seven and Severo because I know if anyone has the ability to find me, to get me out of this, it's them. It will always be them.

Help! I'm with Kelsey on her boat. Going towards the gulf. It's 12:33 now, please, find me. But if you don't, one night with the two of you was worth every second of pain I've ever suffered.

Hitting send, I allow myself a few minutes to mourn what could be the end of my future. I'm not ready to give up, not by a long shot, but I need to prepare for the worst too. And as long as there's no fire involved, I think I can handle Kelsey. I just need to outsmart her.

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CHAPTER 8

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Seven

Pulling up in front of Aria's home, I breathe a little easier. Being away from her, even for a couple of hours, has been harder than I would have thought. But we get to see her now. Touch her, kiss her. I can handle anything so long as I've got her.

Our trip to Mobile took a couple hours longer than expected because Castle wanted to show us around their outfit. The man beamed with pride as he explained what they'd been doing over the years, and I can't blame him. He built his MC from the ground up after his father passed away and some of the more crooked members were hauled off to prison for one thing or another.

Like us, they work hard to do good for those who need it, but it's the illegal shit that helps fund everything. Good and evil, light and dark, we all exist in a world of gray. Nothing is perfect.

"Let's get this over with so we can take our girl home." Severo jumps out of the Tahoe like he's a kid at a carnival. Excitement has him rushing up the steps to the front door just as thunder slowly begins to roll through.

"Gonna be a wild night," Bishop comments. With the way the sky has gone from bright to ominous, I tend to agree with him.

"Oh, thank god." I hear Lilith's concerned voice as I climb the steps. "Have you heard from Aria?"

My eyes find Severo to see him frowning. Reaching into my pocket for my phone, I don't have any messages. "No. Why didn't you call sooner?" King and Holden come out of the war room with matching expressions.

"No. Don't fucking say it. Not again." My brother's panicked voice expresses my own fears because we know that look. It haunted us for

months, even after we got her back the last time.

“I’m afraid it might be,” King seethes calmly.

“What was she doing today? We dropped her off, but she never mentioned any plans. Where’s Hadley? She always knows.” Ro begins to pace as I text Aria and then call her.

“It’s me. Text me; no one calls anymore.” That message has always made me laugh in the past, but now I’m annoyed. I don’t leave a message because there’s no point. If she’s not answering, there’s a reason.

“Hadley has no idea. I’m waiting to hear from your parents. They spoke to her before they went home this afternoon,” Lilith says, hands ringing in front of her as I call my father.

“Hello?” He’s out of breath, and I immediately know why.

“Where’d Aria go?”

“What? What’s going on?” I can hear Mom and Dimitri in the background now.

“Lil said you and Mom talked to Aria this afternoon. She mention any plans?” I don’t have time to wait around searching. None of us can survive another attempted murder.

“Her friend texted her, asked her for lunch. I think she was going. She wanted to see if they could mend their friendship because Aria is almost positive the other girl has a crush on her.” *Jealousy.*

Again.

From a fucking girl this time.

“Get here. Aria is missing, and we need to find her.” I hang up before anything else can be said. I fucking hate this. For her. For us. For the family.

We don’t fuck around with people. We sure as hell aren’t perfect, but in the last thirty years, I know the worst thing my dads and uncles have done is take women out of shitty situations and give them a better life.

We don’t fucking deserve this.

My rage grows uncontrollably, and before I know it, my fist is embedded in the plaster beside the front door, and my phone is smashed on the ground on the other side of the room. I’m fucking livid at myself. At Kelsey. At my brother.

Rationally, the only one I should be angry at is this Kelsey bitch. Never did I think I could lay hands on a woman, but if she’s hurt one hair on

Aria’s head, I’ll cut her head off her shoulders and mount it on my fucking wall.

Severo

I can see Sev losing his grip on reality. He’s blaming himself and plotting this girl's death, even as he smashes his other hand through the wall. Nobody disturbs him because Seven needs an outlet. We’ll fix the plaster later.

Knowing Aria is out there without our protection—likely afraid—pisses me off in ways I can’t think about. Not yet. Not until we find her. Because if I do, I might get locked in old memories of watching her die again, and I can’t let that happen. I can’t fail Aria and Seven like that. I fell apart last time; I need to be the rock for them both this time. Because if they lose it, then so will I, and nobody needs that.

“We found her once, we’ll do it again,” I reassure Sev, but he just shakes his head.

“She’s a fucking cunt who is going to die at the bottom of the sea, right?” Hadley slams through the door with Lake in tow.

“What?” I snap at her.

“I went to her house. She has pictures of Aria everywhere. She’s in love with her, and I’m betting she kidnapped her because you two finally manned-up and laid claim.” Tugging her hair back into a rough bun, Hadley drops her hands on her hips aggressively. “If you don’t kill her, I will.” And as I watch her twitch and pace around the room, Lake is gripping onto her own suspenders, trying to calm herself down.

I could see Hadley doing it too.

The image makes me laugh, and the whole room looks at me like I’ve lost my fucking mind. Maybe I have. “Can you picture Hads killing someone?” Christ, this woman is going to put some man through his paces one day.

“So, where would she take her?” King asks Hadley, stopping her with a hand on her arm as she passes him.

Blowing out a breath to calm down, she closes her eyes to think. “We’ve gone out on their boat a few times. It’s just a small sailboat. Kelsey has sailed her entire life, but she’s never gone out of the bay. If she goes into the Gulf...” The unshed tears in Hads's eyes are felt around the room. “I don’t know if they’ll make it out.”

“There are tropical storm warnings right now,” Holden growls as my parents walk through the door, looking worried and angry.

“We didn’t know.” Mom’s agony is palpable. She and Aria have always had a special relationship. More like giggling friends than family. Something that has always allowed Aria to be more open with her than any of the other aunts. It’s a bond that has grown over time, and now I can see Mom is petrified that she’s to blame.

Wrapping an arm around her shoulder, I kiss her temple. “You didn’t know, Mom; none of us did.”

“When is the storm coming in?” Sev asks Holden, any trace of compassion missing from my brother’s expression. He’s entered rescue mode. Survival is what’s going through his mind.

After the hell we all went through the last time this happened, I don’t think he can allow his emotions to take control. Hell, neither can I.

“Early morning. Depending on if or even when they get to an affected part, they could miss it altogether. What we need is to figure out where they’re going.” Everyone looks at Hadley.

“She’s from Tampa, I think. Or Sarasota. But around there. You could talk to her parents. When I was there, they seemed concerned about her, but it was more than just the fact they hadn’t heard from her. I think they know something’s wrong with her but didn’t want to tell me.”

“Who do we know in the Coast Guard?” I ask, wondering if the twelve-hour journey in good weather would be something Kelsey has ever done. “What if she doesn’t take Aria beyond the Gulf?”

“She’d have to know a storm was brewing. Would she chance it, Hads?” Holden glances up from the tablet screen he’s staring at to ask.

She swallows roughly. “Normally, I’d say no, but I have no idea with the state she might be in.”

“We need a fucking plan.” Seven hisses as Lake bandages his hands. My brother’s expression softens when she flinches and takes a step back.

“I’m going to Kelsey’s house. Her parents will talk to me,” Lilith announces. I almost feel bad for the people as she and my mom walk out the door, Daniel hot on their heels.

“Coast Guard is aware of the situation. We need the boat’s name and make,” Dimitri relays as he hangs up his phone.

Silence pervades the room as realization dawns. We can do nothing more until we know where Kelsey is sailing to.

I’ve never felt so fucking helpless before.

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CHAPTER 9

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Aria

I feel like I can't breathe. The room isn't that small, and the window is open, but the situation is suffocating. I heard the engine shut down an hour ago, but everything's been quiet since. Watching out the porthole, the sun is fading, and storm clouds are languorously rolling in.

I've sailed on the Gulf before with my family, but it was a chartered boat for a weekend. The waters were calm then, and still, it was slightly terrifying.

Now it's just Kels and me, and I don't think she's equipped to handle any kind of storm. Not out here and not without help.

Inhaling deeply, I know I have to be the one to rescue myself because nobody knows where we are. "Kelsey?" I call her name again. She's ignored me every other time, but I won't stop. "I have to go to the bathroom." Leaning my head on the wood panel, I jump when I hear the lock disengaging.

"Step. Back." Her voice is monotone. Nothing of the person I've known for the past year is present.

"I'm back." I wait with bated breath.

As she pushes the door open, I inhale sharply when I see the small revolver she holds in her hand. My eyes widen, and I raise my arms. I don't want her thinking I'm a threat. Not yet.

"One wrong move, and I'll put a hole in your belly." Which would be a truly terrible way to die. Agonizing.

"Just need to pee." I don't, but I needed her to open the door. "Are you hungry?" I ask when I see everything still on the table. "I could make us those sandwiches. Maybe we could talk about what's going on."

I hesitantly walk in the direction she's pointing towards the head. She doesn't say anything as I step in and close the door. Forcing myself to pee, I wash my hands and make quick work of looking for some sort of weapon, but there's nothing in here but soap and a hand towel.

"Hurry up!" She bangs on the door, making me jump again.

Tentatively, I open it and step out, allowing it to close behind me. "I could use something to eat too." Keeping my voice calm is the hardest thing I've ever done.

Her eyes flick to the side before she gives a clipped nod. "Fine. Don't screw around." I give her a tight smile before moving closer to the table.

I let the silence fill the space for a few minutes before finally asking, "What are we doing out here? There's a storm rolling in." As soon as I finish speaking, thunder crackles across the sky. "We can't stay out here."

"We'll be fine." She ignores my words of caution.

Putting the food together, I place sandwiches on two plates with apple slices and hold them out as I walk over to the seat across from her. "I noticed the way you looked at me. At the boutique, when I was trying on dresses. I know you didn't mean for me to see it, or maybe you did; I don't know. But I get the feeling that's why we're here." I keep my eyes lowered as I talk, not wanting to put her on the defensive.

"It doesn't matter. You chose those two men. You didn't even consider me." The venom in her tone matches the hatred I see in her eyes.

"I didn't know," I defend. Until that day, I had no clue.

"Would it have mattered?" Her eyes narrow.

Taking a bite of my apple, I think before I speak, not wanting to set her off. "I wish I knew, but I wasn't aware. I think I've been in love with the twins my entire life, but that doesn't mean I wouldn't have been open to something different."

I see a hint of hope in her eyes before she dashes it away. "I've been getting close to you all year. Letting you heal from what Tristan did. I wanted you to feel comfortable with me because I don't care about your scars." She reaches forward to brush a finger down the puckered skin of my cheek, and I barely tame my flinch. "I wish I could have given them to you," she whispers like this is a seduction, and I asked to be burned.

"You want to scar me?" The anger I've been suppressing so I could be reasonable and get out of this with my life comes raging forward. "Do you comprehend the hell I went through that day and the following days, weeks,

months? Christ, it’s been four years, and I still suffer because of him. And you want to sit here telling me you want me, but you also want to put me through literal hell as well?” I’m screaming by the end, and even if I might regret it later, I don’t now.

Her eyes grow wide as I push to my feet. I notice she leaves the gun on the bench as she stands too. “The scars enhance your beauty, Aria. You were so perfect before. Flawless. Untouchable. What he did... He made you a masterpiece.” I think I’m going to be sick.

Storming towards the stairs leading to the deck, I snare her in a glare meant to send her straight to hell. “You’re as sick as he was, and when the twins find me, because they will, you’ll get to meet him. You can spend eternity burning in the pits of hell right alongside him.”

I rush up the stairs just as the skies open wide and rain pours down on us like a tsunami. “Aria, wait!” Spinning, I see Kelsey's hands are empty. Precisely as I wanted. “He did you a favor.” My hatred grows the more she speaks.

“A favor? You’re kidding, right? I spent a year physically recovering. A year of my life wasted reliving all the pain he put me through. Still, he invades my head every night. How is that a favor?”

“I’m not like him,” she says. I let her walk closer to me as I back into one of the pillars holding a sail closed.

“You want to hurt me because I somehow rejected you when I didn’t even know you were interested. You are *exactly* like him, only I think you’re worse. Because you have the knowledge of what he did to me, and you want to torture me too.” She reaches a hand towards me, and when I grip her wrist, a slight smile forms on her face, obviously thinking I might want her too.

Tightening my hold, I drag her forward, moving only as she’s about to hit me, and instead, she smacks her head off the pillar. Her body drops to the ground, and I rush to grab the rope hanging off a hook and tie her hands and feet together.

“Okay, now what,” I ask myself.

Pushing my wet hair off my face, I drag Kelsey to one of the lounge chairs in front of the covered cockpit. There’s a radio in there, and I can call for help.

Lightning and thunder continue to pepper the sky as the rain falls harder, pelting my skin like pointy icicles. Grabbing the raincoat I see

hanging up, I put it on and pull up the hood. My eyes never leave Kelsey's unconscious form on the chair as I pick up the radio.

Pressing the button on the side, I pray. "Hello?" There's static. "I…I…I need help. Hello? Is anybody there?" My voice cracks at the end.

"This is the United States Coast Guard. Identify yourself." I nearly weep with relief.

"My name is Aria Adair. I've been kidnapped. I don't know where I am or what to do. I need help." My tears mingle with the rain as they both slide down my face.

"We are aware of your situation. Can you read us your location?" Panic quickly washes away the relief.

My eyes roam the gadgets in front of me, but I have no clue what any of them mean. "I can't; there's so much equipment."

"Princess. Breathe, baby. You can do this." My knees almost buckle when I hear Severo's voice.

"I don't know how to tell. The storm is getting worse. The water, it feels like it might throw the boat." I don't know which dial indicates my location, and my body begins to shake.

"Aria!" Seven's voice snaps me to attention. "Take a breath, then get a life jacket on. We'll come back to the coordinates in a second."

"Okay." I breathe in deeply. "Okay. I'm doing that. Hang on." As if they'd leave me. I know in my soul that they wouldn't. Pulling open the tops of the benches around me, I secure the two life vests and put mine on before sliding one onto Kelsey as well. As much as I want her to suffer, I don't want her to drown and never face justice for nearly killing us in this damn storm.

"I'm back. How do I tell where I'm at?" The line crackles with static as more lightning strikes in the distance. Or what I thought was the distance until the boat explodes around me, tossing me into the raging water.

Seven

She was there. For a split second. We've been on the water with the Coast Guard for over an hour, and when we heard Aria's voice, I almost fucking cried.

"Gentlemen, we've lost her. However, we ascertained her location." He points in the distance, and I see the smoke and flames.

"The boat exploded?" I shout, leaving the warmth of the cockpit and striding to the tip of the bow, trying to get a closer look. To get to Aria. "Can't you go any fucking faster? She could be burning alive!" *Again.* I don't say it out loud, but as I feel two hands on my shoulders, to see Severo and my dad, Dimitri, they all know I'm thinking it.

Turning around, I lay my eyes on King, one of the strongest, most ruthless men I know, standing with a blank expression on his face as rain pelts his skin. There's no emotion in his movements as he takes measured steps closer. He's been here before too. Felt the despair. The agony of not knowing.

"She'll be alright," Dimitri assures, and I don't know if it's for me and Ro or King. "She's smart and resourceful. A little fire isn't going to extinguish her flame."

Inch by inch. Mile by mile. We get closer as pieces of wood and fiberglass begin floating past us in a blur until finally, we're upon the wreckage.

"This is the US Coast Guard! Aria Adair, if you hear us, blow the whistle on your life vest." A few minutes go by, and nothing, as spotlights search the water for their bodies. The message is repeated until finally, I hear it.

"Over there!" I shout, pointing to where I see two forms on a hunk of the hull, floating and hanging on for dear life.

Noticing the coast guards moving towards the life preserver, I follow along. "You have to stay here, sir." One man holds a hand up to stop me while another shakes his head. Knowing there's nothing that will deter me from going after my girl—*our girl*—Severo stands beside me with an extra life vest as he puts one on.

The closer we get to the women, the easier it is for me to recognize that Aria is bleeding from her head, leg, and side. I don't know if it's from debris or fire, but I don't intend on waiting to find out. With less than twenty feet from us, I can see the absolute terror in her eyes as she attempts to hang on to the unconscious woman beside her and keep them both afloat.

“Fuck this,” I hiss a second before diving into the water. Is it the brightest move as a wave swallows me? No. But I won’t stop before my baby is in my arms.

Noticing her frantically kicking feet, I begin my trek through the frigid water and don’t stop until I swim to the top. Breaching the surface, I quickly wrap an arm around her waist and grip the hull she’s clinging to.

“What are you doing?” she screams at me while crying into my neck.

“Saving my girl,” I respond. “Wrap your arms around me; I’ve got Kelsey.” Aria’s arms and legs cling to me like a lifeline as I keep them both steady.

“You could have died,” she chatters.

“So could you. Wasn’t willing to risk it.” Kissing her temple, I savor the feeling of her safe in my arms. Eyeing up the woman who nearly destroyed any future we could have had, the desire to let her drown is overpowering, but I can’t do that with so many witnesses around.

“I wanted to leave her. Let her suffer the way she hoped for me to.” Aria’s teeth continue to chatter. “I wanted her to know what Tristan felt when you destroyed him because, Seven, she wished to hurt me like he did.” *Christ.* The shit she’s been through.

“You’re better than her, princess. Causing harm isn’t within you.” The rescue boat is only feet from us now.

Her cold and shaking hands grab my face. “But it is in my blood, and I need her to suffer.” Her eyes speak louder than her words. She’s begging me to hurt this girl. With a quick nod, I let her know that whatever she desires will happen.

“Bring them over,” one of the coasties calls out.

“Aria first.” When Severo reaches out, glaring at me, his face softens when Aria cries out for him. Easily tugging her into the boat, he cradles our girl in his lap.

“The other woman?” a man asks, and I gaze down at Kelsey, her eyes fluttering open. I see the moment awareness hits, and she realizes that she’s not only bound but in the water, and her life hangs in my hands.

“I should let you drown, bitch.” Panic widens her eyes. “I should make you suffer for even thinking you could torture Aria. She wants me to, you know? I want to, too.” My eyes swivel to see Aria and Severo watching our exchange. “But my woman is compassionate and kind. Everything right in

this world, and she doesn’t deserve another second of thinking about you and the regret your death would cause her.” Tears swim in her vision.

“Sir!” The guard calls again.

“Thank her for your life, and then she’ll never think of you again.” Handing her over to the rescuer reaching for her, I wait until she’s in the boat before accepting the helping hands reaching for me just as another wave throws the water into chaos.

Aria

Clinging to Severo as his arms wrap tighter around my body, I can’t hear what Seven is saying to Kelsey, but I see the intensity in his eyes. He wants to let her go. He wants to let her die. But when he looks over at me, his gaze softens, and I know, I just know he’s going to go against my wish in that moment of weakness because he understands me. To my soul, and that I’ll have regrets later.

“He’s a good man,” I mumble.

Severo kisses my temple, and I close my eyes, savoring the warmth of his touch. The love I feel in that instinctual act. “He loves you.” Lifting my chin with a finger, his lips drop to mine, and we breathe. The same air, the same relief. “I love you, Aria Adair.”

The tears I’ve been holding back all day crash through like the tsunami trying to claim the sea now. “I know. I love you too, Ro. I love you both. So much.”

The cuts all over my body begin to sting as my adrenaline plummets, and Seven finally joins us, his chest pressed to my back. “You can’t do that again,” he murmurs against the nape of my neck. “I can’t handle it. Twice is my limit.” The stress in his voice squeezes my chest.

“You and me both,” I whisper before turning to face him. “I love you, Sev. I’ve always loved you both. I never knew I’d be so lucky to call the two of you mine, but here we are, and I do, and I’m just…” Emotion clogs my throat. “I’m just so grateful that you’ll always come for me.”

“Forever,” they vow at the same time. I hold onto this moment until we’re on the Coast Guard boat and being looked over by the medics. Thankfully, my wounds are superficial, but they still want me to go to the hospital because I hit my head in the explosion.

My dad and Holden hover as I’m helped off the boat before finally taking turns wrapping me in their arms. “I’m okay, Daddy.”

“Of course you are. You’re your mother’s daughter, but that doesn’t mean I didn’t lose another ten years off my life.” He sounds so tired.

“You taught me to take care of myself. I was prepared this time. I knew what to do.”

“We did,” he reassures himself. “I know we did, but fuck, if I could burn everything to the ground just to keep you safe, I would.” Someone clears their throat, and I know it’s a police officer, but I don’t care.

“I’ll help you.” Smiling as I look up at him, he kisses my head the same loving way he’s done my whole life, and I feel a weight lift off my shoulders. This time, I won’t carry the burden of guilt from a kidnapping I couldn’t have prevented any more than the last one.

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CHAPTER 10

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Severo

For the past three days, I've been watching Aria. The way she eats, sleeps, walks. I can't keep my eyes off her. She's still stiff and sore from being thrown from the boat and then rescuing a bitch that deserves to be lying on the ocean floor.

But that's not our girl.

She's tough. Resilient. A fighter among fighters.

"You keep staring at me," Aria accuses as she flits around our kitchen like she's always been meant to be here. Hell, she has.

"I am." No point in denying it.

"Yet, neither of you have tried taking me to bed." I stand up straighter at her directness.

"We haven't," Seven says as he enters the room, leaning on the opposite side of the doorway as I am.

"I'm beginning to think it was all in my head." She still won't look at us.

"What was?" I ask her.

Placing the cookies she pulled out of the oven on the cooling rack, her eyes finally lift. "The way you make me feel." A strand of hair from the messy bun on her head falls forward, and I realize this is the first time she hasn't tried to hide her scars. "The way you make me burn inside."

Sharing a look with my twin, I move to shut the stove off while he prowls around the counter and, without warning, lifts her over his shoulder and carries her out of the kitchen.

"About damn time," I hear her grumble on our way up the stairs.

I haven't given it much thought as to why we've held back these last few days; she even agreed to stay here with us for a bit. We could have been making love day and night, but I think the remembrance of how fragile she was after Tristan had something to do with it.

Entering the bedroom, Seven is stripping her down as she sways in front of him to a song in her head, and her eyes are closed. I take *my* clothes off, not hesitating to press in behind her, using my hands to massage the globes of her tits while Sev kneels in front of her. He's addicted to her sweet pussy.

"Together this time," I whisper against her neck, and she hums. I already know I'm the one taking her ass this time. I need to feel the most profound connection possible, and this is the way to do it.

"Together." She smiles in agreeance.

Parting her ass cheeks, I press my hard length against the tight nestle of muscle, slowly moving back and forth. Applying pressure but not breaching her.

"Tell us what you want, Aria." Seven's hands move up her hips, along her ribs, and when he stands in front of her, he holds her face between his palms. Treating her like the precious princess she is.

"Tell us everything." I groan when she pushes back into me.

"You. I just want both of you. Moving inside of me, owning me. Taking away my breath and giving me everything you are." Such a perfect request.

Seven drops down onto the bed, and she falls to her knees, shocking us both. With one hand on Sev's thigh, her head turns towards me, and she kisses the tip of my dick. A guttural groan rips from my chest when her lips wrap around the head.

Aria doesn't hesitate to suck me into the back of her throat, and when she swallows, I damn near bite my tongue off as a hoarse moan climbs my throat. "Fuck, princess... Aria. Fuck." I can't form a coherent thought.

When I feel her pulling away, I want to drag her back, but then she turns her full attention on my brother and offers me her perfect ass. Tight, round, creamy globes with the most perfect little rosebud peeking out at me. I'm instantly addicted. Nothing else matters in this moment.

Aria

Severo’s hands are rough on my ass, bruising in their grip, but I don’t mind. I relish in the feel of his masculinity. Just like when Seven’s fingers drag through my hair, tugging on the strands as my lips wrap around his engorged length. I can’t help sucking him to the back of my throat until we play tug of war. Him trying to pull me off, me wanting to stay on. Ro chuckles behind us as he notices what’s happening.

“Relax and let her, man. I don’t think this is one you’re going to win.” They argue over my head, but all I can think about is giving them pleasure. Raising my hips higher, I spread my thighs more, needing to feel Severo touching me.

“I don’t think there’s a loser in this game,” Seven groans as his body bows off the bed when I swallow him deep into my throat. “Fuck, she’s going to suck the cum right from my balls.” I grin around his length at the description. One day I will.

“Take me,” I gasp as I pull up for a breath of air. “Please, just take me.” I’ve felt off-kilter since we arrived back home, and the desire I have for these two men who risked their lives for me is like a drum in my chest. Beating painfully until I can’t breathe, and I just hunger for them. Both of them. With me. Together, forever.

Seven grips me around the waist and drags me up his body. His gorgeous eyes searching mine, making sure I’m okay. And I am. I’m joined with them forever, so I’ll always be alright. “Please,” I beg again, and there’s no more hesitance.

Widening my legs, I slide down his length until he forces his hips upwards with a sharp thrust that makes me scream and cry at the same time. His fingers brush the tears away, and I lay down on his chest, finally...finally feeling like I’m almost home.

“You can’t cry, princess, or I’m going to think something’s wrong and stop.” Seven cups my head and holds me tight.

“I just need to be home,” I whisper, and I know they’re sharing a look. They always do.

“You want us to take you home?” Severo sounds confused, and I can’t blame the poor man.

“You two are my home. When you’re inside me, everything in the world is right. That’s what I need. What I crave.” Their hands roam across my

flesh a little more forceful now, and I know they finally get it.

“Whatever you need.” Severo kisses down my spine until I finally feel his fingers begin to penetrate, and I wiggle for more. There is nothing better than the feeling of them both inside me.

“Faster.” I glare down at the man who has the gall to grin as he works his fingers in and out unhurriedly, drawing out the torturous play.

Closing my eyes, I begin working my hips on Seven because I know he’ll get his twin in line, and they’ll eventually take me together. No more playing. No more teasing.

“For fuck sakes, Ro, if you don’t want to miss the party, take that sweet ass now.” Positioning to finally complete us, Severo doesn’t hesitate to lube himself up before pushing in gently, at first, then slamming his hips in one forceful thrust, making us all moan together.

“Home,” I sigh, knowing this is exactly where I’m always meant to be. Between these two men who have loved me my entire life.

They rock, we sway, moans are our orchestra as their hands grab me wherever they can reach, and I struggle to remember my name. Pushing up from Seven’s chest, they both, in tandem, wrap a hand around my throat. Stroking the sides with a thumb each.

It’s comforting and highly erotic when their entwined fingers squeeze slightly. Only enough to steal any deep breath before I can inhale. Grasping each of their forearms with my hands, I dig my nails in as my eyes close and pleasure begins to erupt like a tidal wave. Starting at the tips of my toes and moving all the way up my body in slow swells until my back bows and their hold tightens again, stealing every last drop of ecstasy from my body as I explode between them.

Exhaustion steals the strength from my muscles, and I collapse, but they don’t stop moving. Seven thrusts in as Severo drags out, and, together, they shoot me into orbit over and over until I don’t know up from down.

Sweat covers our bodies, and nobody can utter a word. We’re all too exhausted, too satisfied to form a coherent thought, let alone express it.

“I love you,” I attempt to exhale as we all crumple to the bed together. Me between them, their hands still wandering across my body, and I realize, for the first time in four years, my scars no longer define me.

I’m no longer the broken princess.

I’m freed from a cage of my own making, and it’s because of them.

“Marry me.” The words burst out of my mouth without thought or planning, and I mean them.

Leaning up over me, they share a look, and, for once, I’m privy to the telepathic connection. It’s one of love and acceptance.

Seven leans down first, licking across my lips before biting the bottom one. “Should be us asking you,” he utters, sticking his tongue out to tangle with mine. “Fuck yeah, I’ll marry you.”

My smile hurts my cheeks as he moves out of the way for his brother. Severo doesn’t do more than kiss me passionately, stealing the breath from my lungs before whispering, “Yes.”

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Epilogue

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SEVEN

Six months later.

Claiming Aria as ours was easy. Everyone in our circle recognized she belonged to us from the minute she was born, and we were drawn to her. But convincing her father to allow us to give her our last names, move in with us, that was the hard part.

Aria is his little girl, and for as big and badass as King Adair is, he's filled with nothing but love and best intentions when it comes to Aria. It's evident in the way he walks her towards us now. Chest puffed out with pride as he watches every step she takes closer to us.

One step closer to belonging to us.

Aria's beauty is amplified by the black and white strapless gown she's wearing. Pearls float seamlessly across the bodice, accentuating her tanned cleavage every time she breathes. White lace ribbons float down from the waistline, brushing the floor, allowing the black silk skirt to play peek-a-boo with every step she takes. But the genuinely radiant thing about Aria today is the confidence she's exuding. Her hair is swept up, and her scars are on full display. After everything she's overcome, witnessing her happiness and confidence and grabbing the world by the balls has made today even more special.

Our girl has found herself, and I like to think we had a hand in making that happen. She hides from nothing and no one now. She has the self-assuredness of her mother but the compassion she has always presented to the outside world. Aria has become the woman we all knew she would one day.

“Break her heart, boys, and I’ll eat yours for breakfast,” King warns once again with a grin on his face as he hands each of us one of her hands.

“Yes, sir,” we respond in kind.

The darkness that used to eat at me, the desire to inflict pain, dissipates with every vow spoken as my brother and I marry the woman we always knew would become ours.

Aria

One year later.

It’s incredible what can happen in a year.

Marriage.

Peace.

Love.

I never believed I would have any of those things in my life. Not after Tristan. But now, with the twins, I have more than I ever imagined possible.

Staring down at the girl in bed beside me, I firmly believe that every minute of pain, every ounce of fear I ever felt, made me strong enough so that when she found me, I would be ready for her.

Three months ago, when my mother and I visited Sparrow House on a dark rainy morning, we found Gus Hunt lying hidden in the bushes beyond the fence. If not for a lightning strike brightening the sky, we would have missed her. Bloody, beaten, and nearly on death's bed, we fought for her.

To survive.

To escape.

To live.

At sixteen years old, Gus has spent her entire life at the hands of a mad man whose only intention was to torture this poor girl.

I still remember the first time she opened her honey-colored eyes and met my worried stare, crying out for her momma. There was an instantaneous connection between us. My soul recognized hers, and from that moment, I fought to bring her home with me.

Seven and Severo stood by my side. No matter how much they knew she feared them, they've held nothing but love for the girl that we're trying to incorporate into our family.

Even if we're more like sisters than mother and daughter, she belongs with us. Gus is part of the clan, and there is nothing we wouldn't do for her.

Like now, lying in bed with her because of another nightmare.

"How's she doing?" I see Severo's shadow in the door before I hear his voice. Coming closer, he touches her covered foot before sitting down next to her. She doesn't tense, and the progress of that simple act brings tears to my eyes.

"We're good. She's good." I smile across at him to see he's watching her with a protective and caring look.

When her breathing finally evens out, I see Seven appear covered in blood.

I don't need them to tell me where they've been all night, I know. They found her father. They slew her dragon, and now she's free.

My love for these men has only expanded in our year of marriage, and as I watch them walk away to get cleaned up, I know I'll be following after them to show them both just how much I adore them and their protectiveness over the girl I claimed as my own before they ever met her.

Severo

Two years later.

"No." Folding my arms across my chest, I stare down at the two most influential women in my life. Aria laughs and rolls her eyes at me while Gus sticks out her bottom lip and pouts.

The progress isn't lost on me. A year ago, hell, even six months ago, Gus would have accepted my answer and tried to get Aria not to fight it. But now, we've showered her with so much love and acceptance that she finally has the confidence to stand up to us. To fight for the things she wants.

I'm pissed with myself for hating this step forward right now.

But she wants to fucking date!

And not just anyone either.

A fucking biker.

The Deviant Sinners MC has gotten close with our family in the couple of years we've been working together, and a few months ago, Gus caught the eye of their club vice president. Prince is a decent guy. Just not for my Gus.

"Please, Ro. It's just dinner." I see her hands twisting at her sides, trying to hide her anxiety.

"What's just dinner?" Seven comes through the back door, making a beeline straight for Aria. Dropping to his knees, my twin rubs his face across her slightly swollen belly. Not in a million years did I think I'd see my twin be so affectionate, but he can't stay away from our pregnant wife.

"Prince wants to take Gus on a date," I repeat through gritted teeth.

"Fuck no." The soft tone is in direct contrast with the man's eyes.

"I already said yes." Aria shrugs and stands, walking away from me and my brother's nuzzling. "He'll be here in an hour." Grabbing Gus, Aria walks them out of the room, and we hear them snickering on the way upstairs to get ready.

"She's horny," Seven remarks.

"Excuse me?" I glare at him.

"The only time that wife of ours does anything she knows will piss us off is when she's horny and wants us to fuck her together. We haven't done that since she got pregnant." Lust pools in his eyes as he speaks.

He's right. When it comes to Gus, we've always discussed things together. Aria has never made a decision without consulting us. Adopting the tormented girl was a no-brainer. We all felt connected to her, and accepting her into our lives was an easy choice.

We've never taken on a parental role because of her age, but we've given her guidance, kept her protected, and now this son of a bitch thinks he's going to date her.

"I'll just kill him before she knows he's here," I reason.

"Sounds like a plan." I knew Seven would be on board.

An hour later, we hear a bike pulling up, and Aria answers the door before either of us can get our hands on the bastard.

I scrutinize the way Prince watches Gus as she walks out of the house, and I have to admit, he seems to care more about the girl than what's between her legs. After kissing her cheek, he walks over to our wife. The both of us let out a feral sound that has the man laughing before he tilts his head towards her.

When he's finally in front of us, I can see in his eyes, Gus isn't just some good-time girl to him. "I'll take care of her," he promises before we can say a damn thing.

Striding over to Aria, we watch as they take off on the man's bike, appreciating that he didn't wear his cut for their date.

"She'll be fine," Aria promises, and the trust I have in her is going to have to be good enough as she walks away.

"Let's go fuck our woman the way she really wants." I smack Seven's chest before following Aria inside and spending the rest of our lives showing her exactly how much we love and appreciate her and the way she enriches our lives.

The End!

Thank you for reading Broken Princess. The next book in the series is Tortured Duchess. Keep reading for a look at the first chapter of Hadley Adair's book.

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Next in the Adair Legacy

Tortured Duchess
Adair Legacy Book 2

Chapter One
Hadley

Unedited/subject to change

Music pounds. My hips sway. The scent of sweat and desperation is in the air as I move across the dance floor. Hands above my head, feet swiftly gliding left to right. I can feel all eyes on me as I swing seductively around the new club in town.

Peaches & Cream is one of the few places you can enter without having to be twenty-one. I have to wear a special stamp, so I'm not served alcohol, but I don't mind. I'm not here to lose my senses. I'm here to celebrate my eighteenth birthday a little late.

My best friends, Aria and Lake, are here too. Aria is sandwiched between her men Seven and Severo as they struggle to keep their hands off of her. While Lake is sitting at the bar sipping a club soda. Saint Rivers, scaring off any man from five feet away.

Opening my eyes as I drop my head back, rolling it on my shoulders, I meet the stare of a mysterious man on the private balcony. Turning to face him, he looks pissed. Filled with rage as I feel his harsh stare touch me. I

watch as he reaches down to adjust his manhood, and when he makes no further move to catch my attention, I turn away.

When I feel strong hands on my hips, I force myself not to push them off. I want the mystery man to come to me. But I also know that Bishop Kincaid has his eye on me. He's been like a brother my entire life and just like the rest of the boys, I know he won't allow anything to happen to me. My father, Castiel Adair, would slaughter anyone who dared to take from me what I didn't give freely either.

"Hands off asshole." I hear Bishop growl as he stands in front of me, arms crossed, deadly stare on the man behind me.

As he removes his hands, I know he wasn't worthy of my time if he listens. It's how I rate all men who try to get my attention. And I get a lot of it. I have my mother's gorgeous blonde hair, soft curves, and model like looks. I'm not vain, I don't actually like the male attention but when I get it, it's sometimes nice.

"Thanks, Bish." I smile up at the man as he glowers at all the other males around us.

"Stop tempting them and I might not have to commit murder tonight." I laugh at his threat, I know he means it, but it's funny all the same.

"I can take care of myself you know. Spent a lifetime training how to kick a man in the nuts and run." I joke as I spin, the mystery man from earlier now gone. I try not to think too hard on the disappointment that settles in my belly.

"Doesn't mean you should have to break one of those pretty nails." He jokes. "Fuck." He curses and I stop moving, glancing back at him, when I see where his eyes are glued, I turn to look, only to Saint with his hand around a man's neck, holding him two feet off the ground. Lake is cowering under the bar and I see red too.

Lake is fragile as glass. Nobody knows why and she won't tell. Saint's obsession with her has grown exponentially over the years and he's the only reason anyone can get her to leave the house. It doesn't mean she's ready for his volatile and vicious ways though.

We know that.

She knows that.

Even he knows that.

He's worse than Uncle Carver from what I've overheard my dad and uncles saying before. And yet, there isn't any better man than Carver. He's

terrifying, to a stranger, but us? He's the uncle who chased us around the yard, bought us puppies for Christmas, and drove us to Junior prom.

"I got this." I place a hand on Bishop's chest as he's about to head over to the scuffle. Skipping over, I check on Lake and see she's holding her wrist to her chest, tears flowing freely down her face. "No," I snap as I storm over to the man in Saint's hold, "the fuck you did not touch her without permission."

I don't let him answer. I don't let Saint squeeze his throat a second longer as I reach between his legs and dig my sharp nails into his tiny balls, making him howl like a dying coyote.

"You touched her." I grit between clenched teeth. Saint slowly lowers the man and I twist my hand. Tears streak the strangers face as he bites his lip. "I should let him kill you." His eyes dart to the beast beside me as he shakes his head. "He'd rip your throat out right here and nobody would stop him." I threaten. It's the truth too. "Do you have any idea who she is?" Just because Saint is here to scare him doesn't mean Lake's father, Luther Sutton, doesn't have a very deadly reputation.

"No." He whines.

I lean down to whisper in his ear, "That's little Lake Sutton." I pull back and I can see he's struggling to understand. I help him along, I'm nice like that. "Her daddy is Luther Sutton." His eyes bulge. My gaze slides to look up at Saint, "That there is Lake's man," one day it will happen, "He's Carver Rivers son. Worse than his own daddy." Wetness coats my hand and as disgusted as I am that he pissed on me, I laugh. "I suggest you leave, and please, don't ever come back."

I let the man go, turn my back, and run smack dab into my mystery man. "I have half a mind to toss you and your friends out." He growls.

Holding my hand away from my body, I shrug. "Can I wash my hands first? He peed on me."

The man blinks a few times before his head falls back and he howls with laughter. The sound makes my girly bits tingle and I have to force myself to not rub my thighs together.

Hello sex on a stick.

"You're funny." He says. "That guy was scared of little bitty you?" He shakes his head like that could never happen.

He's not really wrong. I just don't like the implication.

“More of what I threatened him with I suppose.” I tell him as I watch Saint help Lake to her feet. “Excuse me.” No attraction will keep me from her. She’s more than family. Lake is life and knowing she’s terrified of her own shadow kills me inside.

“Are you okay?” I wrap my non-peed on hand around her shoulders as I lean into her.

“Yes.” I feel more than hear the word. “Can I go home now?” I can feel her vibrating so I reach back and grip Saint’s hand, wrapping it around her shoulder. I kiss Lake on the cheek.

“Go home with Saint.” I stare deeply into her eyes, praying she knows what I mean. She looks down. “To your house Saint.” I demand, knowing full well, I can’t make this man do a damn thing, but for once he nods and I breathe a little easier.

I watch as they leave together, Aria and the twins following behind them. When I spin back around, intent on finding a bathroom, I’m almost knocked on my ass by the hot mystery man again.

“Jesus, you’re like a rabbit, you just pop up anywhere. Someone should put a bell on you.” I half laugh when I see the look in his eyes. I’m not sure how to read it.

With his arm already around my waist, he pulls me closer, making my breasts pop up, almost right in our faces. To his credit, he doesn’t look down, he maintains eye contact. “I’m Ashton DeMarco and you sweet lamb, I need to know much more about you.”

Before I can say anything, his lips are descending on mine and licking across the seam of my mouth. When I gasp, he takes advantage, swooping in with his tongue and tasting me. I can’t help the moan to rise in my chest or what my foolish hands do.

Run through his soft, thick hair.

“Fuck.” I hiss and he pulls back.

“Such filthy words shouldn’t pass these lips.” Oh he’s smooth.

“Well, what if I told you I just touched your hair with my pee hand?” I cringe as his eyes roll up, as though he can see the damage I’ve caused. “I really need to wash my hand and you really need to wash your hair and maybe this fancy suit, and we should probably find housekeeping to mop that—”

Placing a hand across my mouth to silence my rambling, I shake my head when I see Bishop approaching, a scowl on his face.

“Are you this talkative in bed?” Ashton asks and it’s my turn to be stunned.

Ashton

Good. I’ve silenced her sexy little mouth. This girl in the tiny maroon dress, swaying around my club begging to be fucked hard and loved sweetly has kept me on my toes more in the last ten minutes than my ex-wife did in all the years we were together.

“I wouldn’t know.” She finally answers and it only takes a second to understand her meaning. She’s a virgin.

“What’s your name sweetness?”

“Oh, uh, Hadley.” The soft cadence of her tone is something I look forward to hearing in bed.

“Hadley what?” I’m not letting her omit anything.

She nibbles the corner of her lip and my dick twitches. “Adair. Hadley Adair.” Her eyes drop and I get the sense this is where I’m supposed to run away.

Where other men have run away.

What she doesn’t know is I’m not other men, and I’m not going anywhere. The DeMarco family is nothing to scoff at.

I know the Adair’s, their reputation. I also know the big guy behind me is likely waiting for her to signal him over or for me to be a dick to her. It’s not going to happen.

“You King or Castiel’s girl?” Her gaze shoots up, shocked.

“Castiel’s.” She’s the rebel then. I don’t know all the kids by name, mostly because I’ve only had dealings with King and from what I understand they protect the daughters in that family better than royalty.

Cas’s daughter pushes the limits though.

I look forward to taming her.

“Think I could offer you and the big guy a drink up on my private balcony before he carts you off?” I know she’s smart enough not to go without him.

“I’m not legal.” She blurts out. I think she’s trying to scare me off now.

“Club soda then.” I say instead. She wouldn’t be in my club if she weren’t eighteen.

“Do you happen to have a bathroom up there?” She winces again and I inwardly cringe thinking about my hair.

“I do.” Stepping back, I place a hand on the small of her back and guide her forwards. “Care to join us?” I ask the big guy.

“Bishop.” She whispers up to me as we reach the stairs.

“Who’s he belong to?” I have a feeling I’m going to need to know all these things. Especially because I plan to keep Hadley as my own.

“Atticus and Catalina.” Explains the man’s height and size. Atticus Kincaid is a big son of a bitch.

“Anyone else here?” I ask her, I doubt it or they’d be with us or would have left with the others.

“Nope. Saint is the one who nearly killed the dick that peed on me. Pussy. Lake was the girl under the bar. You see her here again, just, take care of her okay?” Hadley gazes up at me with weariness and pain in her gaze so I nod. “Aria was with the twins, Seven and Severo.” I’ve heard of them. Troublemakers. They nearly burned down Florida in search of Aria some months back.

“Quite the family you’ve got.” I tell her as we reach my private room on the balcony. “Bathroom’s through there.” I point towards my private quarters.

As soon as she’s out of ear shot, Bishop barks, “What do you want with her?”

Removing my jacket, I lay it on the small table next to me and roll up my sleeves. Once Hadley’s done in there, I’ll be washing my hair in the damn sink.

“You want the PG answer where you think you’ll be able to scare me off or do you want the honest one that you’ll go telling her in the hope it’ll scare her off?” I raise my chin, challenging him to dispute either of those options.

Sitting in a chair, he nods his head before answering. “Hads won’t let anyone scare her off of anything. She’s pretty, extremely smart, not much common-sense sometimes though. She’s a live and learn kind of girl.” I file his explanation away for future use. “I would like the truth though.” He leans forward, placing his arms on his knees as he waits for me to speak.

“I plan to keep her. Hadley has an air about her. She’s refreshing and I get the feeling life with her will never be dull.” And I look forward to every damn moment.

“No, it won’t.” He laughs. “But you’re going to have the fight of your life with her. She has secrets. She’s headstrong and she won’t take kindly to you *keeping* her.”

“Anything I need to know?”

Bishop leans back, extending his hands across the back of his chair. “Probably.”

“Gonna share it?”

“Probably not.” *Asshole*.

“Well, I don’t think I’ve ever scrubbed my hands so hard in my life.” Hadley’s vibrant voice says as she comes back.

“Order whatever you like, I’ll be right back.” She appears disappointed, so I place my hand under her chin and lay a light kiss on her lips. Her immediate sigh is giving me blue balls as I head back to my office to wash my hair.

I came to the club tonight to check on Peaches & Cream. See how it was running. It’s only been open a few months and I wasn’t so sure this was the route I wanted to go, but now that I have, I know it was the right move.

If only for the fact I’ve met Hadley.

A fucking firecracker that one.

How I’m going to let her go home tonight, I have no fucking clue because the idea of her not being in my line of sight for more than a few minutes is daunting.

Running the water cold, I quickly wash my hair and towel dry it. I don’t give a shit about what it looks like because if I have my way, Hadley’s fingers will be back in it again.

Checking the messages on my phone, because it seems like I can never get away from the managers of my other clubs, I turn the device on silent and pocket it before leaving my office. As I enter the club again, I can see Hadley and her escort are in a heated argument.

“Everything alright?” I ask over the pounding of the music. The girl spins, a scowl on her face before throwing her body onto the couch. Not liking her being upset, I set my glare on the big man. “What’s the problem?”

He huffs as he stands. “She’s got a curfew.” He bites out.

“Isn’t she eighteen?” I retort. He nods reluctantly. “Doesn’t that tend to mean she’s an adult then.” I don’t pose it as a question as I saunter over to her. Sitting down beside Hadley, I lift her into my lap so she’s straddling my hips. “How about you go call her folks, let them know she’s safe, but she’ll be late.”

Dismissing the man, my eyes roam Hadley’s frame. The way she worries her lip between her teeth, pulls at the hem of her dress. I make her uncomfortable.

“You nervous Hadley?” She won’t meet my stare. A minute ago she was a seductive little siren, now she’s an innocent lamb. “You want to leave me?” I won’t force her to stay, but I’m not exactly letting her out of my life either.

She leans forward. “This isn’t me.”

“What isn’t?” I turn my head slightly to look at her.

“I’m not a seductress. I don’t kiss guys that I just met. And frankly, I don’t trust men outside of my family very well.” I nod.

“Good. I don’t want you to be any of those things. But you need to know little lamb,” cupping her cheek in my hand, her breath hitches.

“Need to know what?”

“That you are mine, and no matter how fast or how far you run, I’m going to give chase.” Her gasp gives me the opening I need to kiss her again before allowing her to leave me for the night.

My biggest regret is that I didn’t get her number before she was taken away.

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About the Author

Hey, I'm Krystal. I write as USA Today Bestselling Author KL Donn. I'm stoked you've grabbed one of my books and I really hope you enjoyed the story!

A little about me:
Perpetual romantic.
Coffee addict.
I speak sarcasm more often than not.
Gimme an action flick over a romance. But a romance book over action. I'm weird like that.
Did I mention coffee addict?
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Husband obsessed. Mine that is, you can keep yours.
Mom of 6, well 7 if you count the husband. Oh and 2 of those are a cat & dog.

I love to connect with my readers so feel free to find me on any and all social media platforms you use! I can't promise to be sane, or not swear a lot, but I'll be extra happy to hear from you!

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